

Kirk LeMoyne Billings Oral History Interview – JFK#10, 06/18/65
Administrative Information

Creator: Kirk LeMoyne Billings
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Biographical Note

Billings was a Kennedy family friend and associate. In this interview, he discusses the Kennedy family's weekend getaways to Glen Ora, Camp David and Wexford, as well as what it was like for the Kennedys to live in the White House, among other issues.

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Kirk LeMoyne Billings – JFK #10

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Oral History Interview

with

K. LEMOYNE BILLINGS

June 18, 1965
New York City

By Walter D. Sohier

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SOHIER: We ended up last time, as I recall, discussing antiquities and I think you said that you might have more to say on that subject. Have we pretty much completed antiquities, do you feel?

BILLINGS: I think we have. If I think of anything further, we can do it later.

SOHIER: Then, maybe we ought to move to life in the White House, sort of the life of the Kennedys' while he was President, and perhaps a good place to start would be your first exposure to the White House, with, I guess, the Inauguration.

BILLINGS: That would be a good place to start. It was the first time I had ever been in the White House. I remember so well that first experience. After the Inauguration, the President and Jackie ate somewhere in the Capitol with the dignitaries. Mr. Kennedy gave a rather small luncheon at the Mayflower for the family and intimate friends, and after luncheon

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there was a bus available to take us all to the White House. I remember so well the first time we went into that building. After all, it was the epitome of what had really happened to Jack. This

was the proof that we had really won. I remember Eunice and I went in together and we were talking about how it almost felt like the part in *Gone With the Wind*, when Scarlett's two old colored servants first moved into her enormous mansion in Atlanta after suffering with her all during the war. As they walked into the house the old mammy said, "Man, we's rich now," and we just felt the same way: we were really in. It was incredible. We went out front to the observation platform where the President was reviewing the parade and we stayed there the rest of the afternoon. I guess it was that evening after the parade was over that we went back into the White House and we were all terribly excited about going up to see the private living quarters. We saw Lincoln's bed for the first time, which is really a thrilling experience. It seems funny now because the White House finally became a home but at that time it was just what it is to everybody: a

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museum in which we could walk without any guards or restrictions. It was a terrific experience.

SOHIER: What was the President's attitude? Do you remember any incident in terms of his first look around? Were you with him when he poked around?

BILLINGS: I think that he had poked around before any of us. He had been up in all the rooms and looked them over with Jackie. We really were a little bit cautious about going upstairs without being invited — all of us, meaning his sisters and brothers and me. And I don't think we were immediately invited up and we were a little hesitant to get into that elevator and rush right upstairs. It was after he and Jackie had gone up and cleaned up a little later that sometime during the evening we were asked upstairs.

SOHIER: I guess the Eisenhowers had just moved out; I mean, it was a quiet of pretty hot beds, wasn't it?

BILLINGS: Yes, the Eisenhowers must have spent the night before in the White House.

SOHIER: Did he indicate that President Eisenhower

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took them around?

BILLINGS: Jackie had been around when she called on Mrs. Eisenhower after the President was elected just before John was born. I remember her going there when she was pregnant. Although she walked all through it, it was quite difficult. I remember she told us about it later.

SOHIER: Did you have dinner at the White House that night or how did that work out?

BILLINGS: I think we did have dinner that night. At that time the family dining room was on the first floor. Later, Mrs. Dowd's bedroom on the second floor was turned into a private dining room. The sitting room of this suite became the kitchen.

SOHIER: Did you have to eat downstairs?

BILLINGS: Her bathroom was turned into the pantry, and actually they didn't even take the tub out. They just built the pantry right over the bathtub in case some future First Lady wanted to change the suite back to bedroom use. This suite was directly across from Jackie's bedroom. To answer your question

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that night we ate in the small dining room next to the State Dining Room on the first floor.

SOHIER: Who was there for dinner, for example?

BILLINGS: Well, I remember Pat was there and Peter was there; for some reason I remember them very clearly. And Bobby and Ethel.... I think the whole family was there.

SOHIER: Mr. Kennedy was there, I guess.

BILLINGS: It's so funny.... I don't remember Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy at all. I think they must have gone home by the time we were ready to eat. I don't think they had supper there that night.

SOHIER: They were making quite a conscious effort to stay out of the visible act, I guess, weren't they?

BILLINGS: Well, certainly Mr. Kennedy always had. Did you know that the Inauguration was the first time he ever was in the act visually? It's the first time actually he was ever in public with the President on any kind of political occasion.

SOHIER: Was this his idea, or the President's idea?

BILLINGS: It was Mr. Kennedy's. I think we've gone

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into this before, Mr. Kennedy's very conscious effort to keep out of the limelight during his son's political career. There was talk and there were

accusations that Mr. Kennedy was the man behind the scenes, that he was the brains and was calling the shots. This, of course was completely untrue, but Mr. Kennedy wanted to make sure that he would never be seen in public. However, at the Inauguration, he was standing right by his son's side during the whole parade. You've never seen a more pleased and proud father than he was. But I don't remember him being at the White House that night. After dinner we all went up and lay on the Lincoln bed! And I think some of us even took pictures of ourselves on the Lincoln bed. It was really corny!

SOHIER: Well, what happened that night then? You all went to various Inauguration balls. Is there anything in particular about the Inauguration night that stands out as far as the President is concerned?

BILLINGS: We had all been assigned seats in the Presidential box — but somehow with all the confusion and crowd

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the seats in his box were all filled up with strangers aside from Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy, Teddy and family. I don't know how it happened. In fact, there was one complete stranger standing right beside him, as you probably know. It's that man who is a professional gate-crasher and he certainly crashed this one much to the embarrassment of the Secret Service because there were many photographs of the President in his box and there was a lot of consternation about who this man was when the pictures were developed.

SOHIER: He probably thought he was some unidentified governor or something.

BILLINGS: Well, as it turned out, he was this professional gate-crasher and there he was, right in the Presidential box. Even Bobby, Ethel and the three girls weren't in the box. I think they finally made space for the three girls, but not their husbands.

SOHIER: Well, now, you spent an awful lot of time with the President while he was President in the White House, staying in the White House, staying at various places with him on

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weekends, and I wonder whether we could sort of develop a little bit of a picture of how they lived and some of the things that stand out in your memory about life in the White House, almost anything.

BILLINGS: Well, I did stay there a lot. As a matter of fact, of course the White House is so very big and there were so many servants that there really wasn't any problem for them to have house guests. The third floor has about six guest rooms and as a matter of fact, I did stay there enough so that I had a room of my own. Nobody else used that room so I could even leave

my stuff there. Jack and Jackie were so nice about this that I didn't even have to tell them when I was coming or going. If they were doing something else, dining or having people in and I wasn't necessarily included, it didn't make any difference. So I really was there a lot.

SOHIER: Did you have to let the Secret Service know? Is there any sort of formality of that kind or could you just come and go?

BILLINGS: It wasn't very long before all the Secret Service

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knew me.

SOHIER: You just appeared at the door and went in

BILLINGS: And all of the guards knew me. Actually, I never had a White House pass in my life. Most people do. At least all authorized Government people certainly do. I was there enough that I never had any.... I don't think I was ever challenged right from the beginning because it's their business, to know people. Jack's life of course changed so much in the Presidency. For the first time in so many, many years, he really could be at home and see his family all the time. This was something that he had never been able to do before. Certainly this was true during his entire married life. During the Senate days, he was working hard on the Hill all day and on weekends for years he had been going up to Massachusetts to campaign. Later on he had been campaigning all over the country, so they really had quite a tough married life as far as weekends were concerned. Therefore his whole life really did change. Here was a man that not only would be home every night and every weekend, but he was also home for lunch. He had the opportunity

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to see an awful lot of his children. His was a very happy family life in the White House.

SOHIER: There was a lot of talk that you picked up, however, while he was President, people noting that he would be someplace for the weekend and Jackie would not be there and it sort of wasn't the typical American life that people thought of. I wonder whether what you just said might explain that a little bit because there was a lot more family life it sound than he had ever been used to before.

BILLINGS: Well, let's talk about that. I think that's a very good question because, you're right, there were, as there always are, rumors about the First Family, certainly Jack and Jackie had their share of rumors. In the first place let's look at where they could go for weekends. I'm going to digress a little bit here because I had forgotten to mention that period between the election and the Inauguration.... In fact, I'll go back further than that, before the election — the summer before the election after the President was nominated but before the election — Jackie asked me to go down to Middleburg

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to find a house. Of course, this had to be very secret even though, I suppose, it would have been all right for a Senator to have a retreat house in Middleburg, but anyway we felt very guilty about it because we were getting it with the idea that this would be a place for them to go when he was President.

SOHIER: Was this sort of secret from him too?

BILLINGS: Oh, no, no secret from him, but he was the one who was very self-conscious about anybody doing it. I was supposed to do it with a great deal of secrecy and I had to lie like a trooper which was really funny because here I am a bachelor looking for a big house which was rather difficult to explain to the real estate man.

SOHIER: It probably fooled nobody, did it?

BILLINGS: I had to make up something that I could believe myself so that I wouldn't be caught on every question they asked. It became amusing because I went down to Middleburg with Judith Hackett who came along for the ride. She's Dave Hackett's wife. For some reason I thought it would be easier to say she and I were married. It would look a little more

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realistic to look for a house if my wife were along. But then we decided anyway, that that was too difficult a story because we had my old rather funny-looking car and for us to be looking for a big estate in that car didn't exactly make sense. I said that I was looking for some Italian friends of mine who were coming over and wanted a house in Middleburg. We had an awfully funny time because since I had brought my wife along the real estate man brought his wife too and everything became very social and we got into all sorts of terrible mixups over it. We found some houses that were interesting, at least, I thought they were. The next time I went down I called and told the real estate man that I just wanted to go down myself and I was just bringing some friends but I didn't need him to come with me and that I would look at the houses alone. I knew where they were; if there were people living in them, would he inform them I would be there. And so then Jackie went with me.

SOHIER: Oh boy!

BILLINGS: And she wore a wig and dark glasses and

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fooled nobody.

SOHIER: You're kidding.

BILLINGS: No; they all pretended. It was the most terrible pretense but later we found out that everyone recognized her. Needless to say, knowing Jackie, she didn't like anything I liked and we had to start all over again. I think Bunny Mellon finally found Glen Ora and instead of buying they rented.

SOHIER: Glen Ora Well, the President wasn't very hot for this idea of moving to Middleburg.

BILLINGS: I didn't want to get away from a very important question you asked about why there were rumors that they didn't spend many weekends together. Remember riding was very important to Jackie — and she felt she had to be in the horse country during weekends. She was also very determined that Caroline be brought up with horses just as she had been. That was the reason for Middleburg, after all, they did have Camp David and the President actually would have been happier there so...

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SOHIER: He rather liked Camp David, didn't he?

BILLINGS: Let's get to Camp David later.

SOHIER: All right.

BILLINGS: You're absolutely right — he didn't like Middleburg at all because there was nothing for him to do there. I mean, there was just nothing. Normally he couldn't get down on a Friday night; he had tried to but he very seldom did. We would usually go down after lunch on Saturday and of course the helicopter would take us all the way there from the White House lawn.

SOHIER: Jackie would go down Friday?

BILLINGS: Jackie would usually go down Friday, spend Friday night there and we would come down Saturday and spend Saturday and Sunday night and come back the very first thing and be in the White House about 9 o'clock Monday morning. But then sometimes Jackie would stay over Monday but usually she'd come back with us. She really loved it at Glen Ora because of the horses. He didn't like it at all except for the restfulness of it but then when the rest was over there was nothing, and he really

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disliked it. He would have much preferred, for instance, to go to the Eastern shore. He's a water man, let's face it, and he would have loved it even though probably there wasn't anything more to do at the Eastern Shore than there was at Glen Ora; at least he could have had a boat. This

always seemed to satisfy him as far as recreation went. He was always happy when he was either at Newport of the Cape.

SOHIER: What sort of exercise could he get at Glen Ora?

BILLINGS: He couldn't get any exercise; in the first place he only played golf once the whole time he was there. There was a golf course fairly close — a mighty long drive actually, but there was one within striking distance. He was actually afraid to play golf after his experience planting a tree in Canada.

SOHIER: Because of his back?

BILLINGS: Yes, and then there was a swimming pool but I don't know.... It seems to me that the Glen Ora pool was always too cold and dirty. I don't ever remember him going in.

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He hated cold water; he'd gotten very used to heated pools.

SOHIER: What would he do — read a lot or work there, or what?

BILLINGS: He got so he couldn't swim in anything but heated water. It's very funny, but you know he got so spoiled about heated pools. The pool at the White House was so hot, so full of humidity and everything. One would have to really like heated pools to swim in it. Up at the Cape, Mr. Kennedy's pool was heated and down in Florida he went to Mrs. Young's pool or to the Wrightsons'. After he rented Colonel Paul's house — he used that pool.

SOHIER: What about his father's pool?

BILLINGS: His father's pool was heated later — it was only heated very recently. It was heated for his father actually. They had a pool at Mr. Paul's house and it was heated and then in Newport he swam in Mrs. Young's pool which was heated. He just couldn't use the Glen Ora pool. He didn't like it a bit. So what did he do? I'll give you an exact schedule because even there he lived by schedule. I probably went down as many weekends as he did. I really was there a lot. The funny thing is that he

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didn't ask me as much as Jackie did. This may sound strange but I think the reason they asked me — and of course I loved going — but the reason I think that they had me was because there was so little for him to do and Jackie wanted to do some riding but she certainly didn't want to leave him alone. She would have felt guilty, I suppose, about going riding so I'm sure that's why Jackie made tremendous efforts to get me there every time they went down.

SOHIER: Well, you probably liked it and maybe she thought you would talk him into liking it too.

BILLINGS: I did like it. I didn't like Middleburg particularly but I always have enjoyed him and I welcomed the opportunity to spend so much time with him.

SOHIER: Well, what was his schedule?

BILLINGS: Well, we would arrive there either sometimes for lunch or immediately after lunch. We would try to get there before lunch whenever possible. They always had, you know, his favorite food and all. He liked good meals, he liked to eat, you know.

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SOHIER: What was his favorite food?

BILLINGS: Well, you know he liked...

SOHIER: Did he have a cocktail?

BILLINGS: Not usually before lunch, no, but he really liked fish chowder. They made a very rich, rich fish chowder for which he had a special recipe.... it's really creamy stuff and.... it's very good, but it must have been fattening. And he'd eat a lot of that and then of course he liked steak. He liked his vegetables always sort of pureed — I guess that's what you call it — you know, all smashed up. And he liked ice cream.

SOHIER: And wine?

BILLINGS: He had rather simple tastes actually. Jackie of course serves a very fancy table but basically the President's tastes, like all the family — they've been brought up on pretty substantial simple good cooking — very simple menus — just the regular meats and the regular normal food. The kind of food he really liked was Italian cooking rather than French cooking. He liked fettucini. They had an Italian cook

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you know. They had a French cook and they had an Italian cook and they had a plain ordinary American woman cook. I remember the Italian cook was usually down at Glen Ora.

BILLINGS: After lunch we'd walk around awhile and talk. Jackie would usually go riding.

SOHIER: Well, you'd just sort of trudge out?

BILLINGS: Yeah, we'd walk around, go down and see the horses. Jackie had made a little golf course — he was so desperate that she made a little golf course at Glen Ora for him.

SOHIER: Well, he's allergic to horses, wasn't he?

BILLINGS: No he's allergic to dogs.

SOHIER: Just dogs?

BILLINGS: Yeah, not to horses. And then he'd go to bed for the rest of the afternoon.

SOHIER: Would he just disappear and read or did he really go to bed?

BILLINGS: No, I don't know — I think he slept. Because you know in the White House he went to bed. This was his normal

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routine after lunch — he always went to bed, even during the week. And then he'd stay in bed.... up there, really, until suppertime.

SOHIER: He obviously read as well as slept.

BILLINGS: Yes, I'm sure he did. He watched television and everything else.... but by himself, resting and reading or doing whatever. And then he'd come down about 6 o'clock and then we'd have drinks. He'd have drinks and we'd usually play backgammon.

SOHIER: Well, he liked daiquiris — wasn't that his favorite drink?

BILLINGS: Yes, he loved daiquiris and Bloody Marys. He liked Bloody Marys better. But never, ever just a straight scotch or bourbon or anything like that. I don't think I've ever seen him drink that in my life.

SOHIER: He never really liked to drink very much, did he?

BILLINGS: No, he never all his life drank, quite frankly. He did have in his later years drinks before dinner and stuff like

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that. However, he'd always had a bad stomach and drinking didn't help so that he never really had the opportunity to drink even when a kid. When we were at Choate and times like that I remember he used to, like all kids did at that time and he probably had more

drinks then than any other time in his life. And then he had stomach trouble and of course there was nothing that played more havoc with it than liquor, so he just never drank much.

SOHIER: Well, he drank wine and champagne, didn't he?

BILLINGS: Not to speak of. I think Jackie again was a great one for different wines but it wasn't important to him. He liked milk much better, much better. He always had milk, but he did have, you know, in his latter years, certainly those years in the White House, he always did have drinks before dinner unless his stomach was really acting up. And then we'd play backgammon.

SOHIER: You mean this was sort of a routine.... you'd always play?

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BILLINGS: We'd always play backgammon. He always played with me. As I think I've said before, we played all the time and it was always very important to him.

SOHIER: You and the President. Then, Jackie — what would she do?

BILLINGS: Oh, then she'd read or she'd talk. I mean...

SOHIER: It wasn't a very serious game?

BILLINGS: Well, we bet, you know. We'd have these terrible arguments about what we were paying for each point, and we'd really fight and argue over that every single game because I never wanted to play for high stakes, and he did. High.... I mean I didn't want to lose in an evening ten or fifteen dollars, you know. I don't like to gamble — I don't think it's that much fun. Well, he does so this was our problem.

SOHIER: But you never paid up anyway.

BILLINGS: No, in the end we never paid each other.

[Laughter]

SOHIER: But even though you knew you weren't going

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to pay, you didn't look at it that way?

BILLINGS: No, we always sort of thought we were going to but we never did because we carried it on. He'd owe me \$15.00 at the end of the weekend or

something and then we would start with that the next weekend and then if we didn't do it for a while we'd forget and start again, you know.

SOHIER: Would he jot down how much you owed him?

BILLINGS: No, no. We never exchanged cash. [Laughter] In the first place, he never had any cash, so I never got any and as a result I never gave him any so....

SOHIER: Now when would he go to bed?

BILLINGS: Well, then we would sit around after dinner and watch television or talk and he would go to bed quite early. I'd say he'd go to bed at about 11 o'clock and usually Jackie would go to bed then, too. And they didn't really go to bed, because I could hear the television going and the records going, so they would just retire at around 11.

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And sometimes Jackie would stay down and talk. As you can see it was necessary for me to take a lot of reading along on those weekends. And then Sunday we would get up and go to church and...

SOHIER: What time would you get up?

BILLINGS: Well, he would usually go to 11 o'clock service.

SOHIER: He didn't get up very early, in other words.

BILLINGS: No, just in time to go to church.

SOHIER: He got quite a lot of sleep when he was...

BILLINGS: Oh yes, this was the whole point, you know. It was the whole point of the weekend really. He had to store up energy. After church we would usually drive around or maybe go and call on somebody. There were not too many people he wanted to call on but he liked Adele Astaire. She was down there and we used to go over there.

SOHIER: That was Adele Douglas.

BILLINGS: Yes, is that her last name.... Douglas?

SOHIER: Yes, Mrs. Scanlon Douglas.

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BILLINGS: Yes. Who else was down there? I think there was somebody else.

SOHIER: I guess the Mellons.

BILLINGS: Yes. We used to go and see the Mellons.... I can't remember anyone else. I think that maybe the Mellons, and Adele Astaire were the only ones whom he ever wanted to see. Jackie had a lot of other friends there — but he never wanted to see them. But then we would drive around and we would go look at old houses and look where people lived and then we would come back for lunch.

SOHIER: This was mostly a bad weather period, wasn't it? I mean, you didn't sit outside in the sun and that kind of thing?

BILLINGS: No, there really was very little sun. I don't remember the sun because when the weather got good, we were going to the Cape. And then in the afternoon, again, he would go to sleep and we would have this same thing again that evening and so on so it was just a repetition of the day before. However, I enjoyed those weekends because it was one of the

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few times when he was President that I really got the chance to talk and have fun with him like the old days. Even though he was in bed a lot we still spent a lot of time together.

SOHIER: Well, let me ask you a couple of things. First of all, you said he watched television. What were his programs; what did he like?

BILLINGS: Well, he liked adventure stories, mystery stories.

SOHIER: Westerns?

BILLINGS: Isn't that funny.... I don't remember. I don't remember really. He liked Jackie Gleason a lot.

SOHIER: Would he watch *Meet the Press*, for example?

BILLINGS: Oh, boy, I forgot that. Yes. Did he ever. I mean unless there was somebody awfully boring on, it was a regular routine.

SOHIER: And *Face the Nation*?

BILLINGS: He would get down to dinner in time Sunday night — what is it, about six o'clock, isn't it?

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SOHIER: Yes.

BILLINGS: *Meet the Press*. That was his favorite. Did I talk to you about *Meet the Press* when he was first on it himself?

SOHIER: No.

BILLINGS: I was with him the first time he ever went on. He must have been a Congressman because I think it was possibly one of the first times he had ever been on national television. And that's one of the things, you know, one can't help but admire about him. Normally you would think somebody would be so scared if they're going on a national hook-up for the first time in their lives. Larry Spivak was going to quiz him and one of his techniques is to try and fluster the guest. After all, that's what make his program. It's only fun when the guest gets sore or gets upset or can't answer the questions properly. He said to Jack something about "Don't be nervous," and Jack said, "I'm not nervous at all — I'm just sleepy." This of course was before he went on the air.

SOHIER: He didn't say this live; he said this before the

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program?

BILLINGS: This was before the program. It was such a wonderful answer because Spivak hated to think he was so relaxed that he was sleepy. But that's the way he was you know. Nothing ever made him nervous. He never was flustered. This was just part of the man. If he ever was nervous he certainly hid it.

SOHIER: What other programs do you recall? Do you remember anything particular about television that is worth talking about?

BILLINGS: No, I think he was always interested in any personality that was important to him. He always made a big point of watching whenever they were on. Programs like *Meet the Press* that had particular personalities in which he was interested. All media was terribly important to him as you know, not just newspapers and magazines but radio and television. Maybe radio not so much except the car radio — whenever he was in the car, he always had the

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radio going.

SOHIER: What did he listen to in the car?

BILLINGS: Well, news was the main thing but you know he also liked music.

SOHIER: What did you and he talk about?

BILLINGS: That is something that I often think about myself because actually what did we have in common? I guess really the main thing we had in common, which was really pretty important, was the fact that we had known each other for 30 years. I really knew him so well that we really didn't talk much about his job. He didn't want to unless there was something really exciting going on. I was there at Glen Ora the weekend of the Bay of Pigs and he was certainly talking a good deal about that. I think that the Bay of Pigs took place on a Monday or Tuesday and I was there that weekend. Naturally during periods such as that we talked about nothing else. Everyday things, he normally didn't discuss with me.

SOHIER: What did he say? Do you remember anything

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he said about the Bay of Pigs? Do you remember any of the discussion?

BILLINGS: Well, he was terribly worried about it. I'm sorry but.... I've tried quite often to remember, but I do remember the other Cuban crisis quite well. I remember a lot more of the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs. I was at Glen Ora also the following weekend — and as a matter of fact, I kept a diary that weekend and even the one following that. During the Bay of Pigs, of course, he was on the phone all the time. But the aftermath.... of course, he was desperately unhappy about the results and he, as we know, publicly took complete blame as he should have. But, as we all know, it was so damn unfair really, because he had only been in the White House....what, a month?

SOHIER: A very short time.

BILLINGS: No.... maybe a little bit more than a month, and all the people around him who were specialists in this area, of course, were inherited from the Eisenhower administration. Anybody he'd brought in, like himself, hadn't really been exposed

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to the whole situation enough to make judgements of their own. He had to depend very heavily on the people who were there before he was.

SOHIER: Did you hear him say this? Or are you saying it?

BILLINGS: No, he said it afterwards to me. In fact, I heard him saying it often privately.

SOHIER: Did he curse out particular people?

BILLINGS: Oh, yes; you see, it was very, very bad. Obviously as President it was his fault and he took the public blame for it. But actually it really wasn't his fault and that was what was so unfair. He had been assured that unless he acted then it would be too late. Intelligence was telling him that at that point Castro didn't have planes, but the planes were coming in and if he didn't act then it would be too late. He either had to act then or not at all.

SOHIER: Who was his whipping boy in these private conversations, if anyone was?

BILLINGS: Well, Dulles and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs

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Arleigh Burke.

SOHIER: Yes, I think it was he.

BILLINGS: Yes, Arleigh Burke, I think it was. I think he was the top Navy man as well as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

SOHIER: I've forgotten — it wasn't Radford, I guess.

BILLINGS: Well, I could be wrong, but even if it weren't Arleigh Burke, I know he was mad at Arleigh Burke. He didn't get rid of him immediately but it wasn't too long after that that Arleigh Burke left. I could be wrong about the position Burke had — but he blamed him particularly. The information he was given was just wrong and he really had no other way of getting the information. He couldn't make any other judgment himself. Of course the worst part about it was he hadn't worked with these people long enough to know whether he could trust their judgement. If he had worked with them a little longer he would have known who to trust. This may have been a good lesson for a young, new President but it was a terribly costly one. He never relied on anybody's judgement

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again the whole time he was in the White House. After that his was a one-man show. I mean the judgements made in his Administration were his and his alone and not dependent upon someone else's in his Administration. He was terribly unhappy about the Bay of Pigs. However, I think probably in the long run it made him a better President and made him learn very quickly not to depend on others. I mentioned earlier that I kept a diary during the two weekends after the Bay of Pigs. Perhaps I should talk about it now. I had never kept a diary involving the President's career. I purposely did not because I felt he would not have wanted me to do so, although my brother had constantly urged me to keep one. He felt it was ridiculous for me not to since I was living in the midst of the making of history. Finally, I decided I would, but I didn't tell the President as I knew he wouldn't like it. It would have made him feel he couldn't talk freely in front of me. I stopped after two weekends because I felt I was being dishonest to him. These

attached pages I wrote those two weekends are good proofs why someone as close as I was should not keep

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records of word for word conversations. So much was said that was not for publication. You will note he said things he didn't even mean such as not wanting to run for office in 1964. He said it to Jackie and me because that's the way he thought he felt at that moment and to us it didn't matter what he said. Obviously, he didn't mean it and was just blowing off steam.

Diary of K. LeMoyne Billings

White House

Saturday, April 29
1961

I met with Sam Mercer from San Francisco at 11:00 am in the Fish Room of the White House. He is a vice president of President Lines and we discussed the U.S. Travel Service. There was much activity that morning in that the President was meeting with all the Government leaders on the Laos situation which was becoming increasingly bad.

The President had hurriedly returned from

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Chicago the night before. He had spoken there at a fundraising dinner, returning to the White House at 1:30 am. Secretary Rusk arrived early Saturday morning from Turkey. I don't know exactly who attended the meeting in the Cabinet Room but I saw both Secretary Rusk and Vice President Johnson.

After Sam Mercer left, I talked with Kenneth O'Connell [O'Donnell?] who told me he had spoken to the President about Don Petrie as Director of the United States Travel Bureau. The President gave me the go-ahead on this. John Seigenthaler told me the Attorney General would see that Adolph Toigo would be named to the Businessmen's Advisory Committee and that Frank Markoe would be elected to the Board of Directors of General Aniline. We waited until 1:30 when the President

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was ready to leave for Glen Ora. I rode in Helicopter No. 2 while the President and his family took No. 1.

Upon arrival at Glen Ora, we sat around the living room for awhile before lunch. Although the President was in good humor and wanted to talk, behind it all I could tell he was extremely upset and concerned about the Laos situation. He told me he was much too tired to make a decision in Washington and had to get some rest before he returned. He constantly blamed himself for the Cuban fiasco. He felt if he hadn't stayed all weekend in Glen Ora and had gone back Sunday night that fateful weekend, he might have learned more about the situation. However, he is still extremely upset about the advice given him by the General Staff. He has learned more recently,

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that they met to review the Cuban plan and in only one hour passed a unanimous okay on going ahead with it. He is equally unhappy about the advice given him by Dulles. However, he blames himself. In looking back he wonders how he could have made any other decision with all his top advisors recommending he go ahead with the plan. I asked him if he had bawled out those responsible and he said he hadn't but that they were well aware of their responsibility in the mistake. Of course, he has lost confidence in them and this makes the Laos decision that much more difficult. He knows he cannot afford to make another mistake.

He asked me if I wanted to send troops into Laos — of course I would rather not if there were any other way. I feel so much more strongly about

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Cuba — He added, if we did not stop them in Laos, Vietnam would be next, then Thailand, etc. Although he wanted to be cheerful and keep his mind off the situation, it was difficult to keep his interest in light conversation which I constantly try to keep going. He said Rusk wanted to go into Laos.

After lunch we walked down to the stables and fooled around with Carolin's new Spanish pony given to her by the Vice President. He is extremely proud of this point and was most gentle with it. Though it is extremely shy, he was able to pet it because he approached it with so much gentleness. His interest in the pony was somewhat surprising to me as he never has paid very much attention to animals. He called for the groom and insisted that the groom let Tex, the pony, run free. Later, Tex

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was put in his paddock with another pony, Macaroni, and he showed a lot of pleasure in watching the pony's spirit.

He returned to the house for a rest and asked me to get a backgammon board so that we could play that evening. I went down to Middleburg where they had never heard of backgammon, so I bought checkers and a new game — very complicated — called “Civil War.” Upon reading the rules later, I realized he never would want to give the time to learn it although I thought at first he would like it because of his great interest in the Civil War. I also bought Jackie an antique snuff box. She had told me the night before, that they had given the Prime Minister of Greece a very boring State visit gift and at the last moment she had picked up one of her favorite

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snuff boxes and given it to the Prime Minister’s wife. It’s this personal touch where Jackie is so good.

I remember when Jackie’s judgement was equally good. The President put in a telephone call to Winston Churchill when the latter’s yacht put into New York harbor. I was at the White House when they talked on the telephone. Apparently Churchill had some difficulty talking because half the time during the conversation the President was talking to Churchill’s aide. After Jack hung up, Jackie said, “Why didn’t you ask him to the White House?” Jack at first didn’t think this was a good idea at all — but then asked Steve Smith to call up Churchill’s aide — which he did — later the aide called back and said that the Prime Minister

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had always been an emotional man, but in his old age he was even more so — that he wept with emotion when given the invitation. Unfortunately, he had to return to London because of Lady Churchill’s health. Actually, it was our belief that it is his own health that is the problem — Jack told Jackie — she was right

again!

Back to Glen Ora. Both of them had slept all afternoon and when they came down to dinner — Jackie was rather in a bad humor — she brought with her a lot of her work on the White House Committee. The President asked her to put it away and talk to us.

At dinner, he told of his meeting with MacArthur. He felt MacArthur was very pleased that the President had talked to him. He admires MacArthur a lot and feels that although he is a

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little out of touch, his mind is as good as ever. MacArthur advised him strongly against sending troops to Laos. He said the Chinese would eat us up — that we had had an opportunity to crush the Chinese during Korea but now a war in Laos would be a terrible mistake.

He said, MacArthur hates Eisenhower and thinks he has no brains at all. The President told us he knew both Eisenhower and Truman were furious that he had called upon MacArthur. We asked him if he planned to use him and he said he didn't think he would. Jackie suggested he invite him to one of the State dinners — not the Tunisian one (next Wednesday) but a more important one.

After dinner he read that the French are increasingly blaming the United States for the

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Algerian uprising. Ridiculously enough, they are blaming the United States for encouraging the insurgents. They even resent his offer for help. He said he wished that he wasn't going over to see De Gaulle and he would call it off if it were possible. He told us that he had decided not to go to England — as he resents their attitude since the Cuban fiasco. He said the Cuban mistake was so far reaching in that it made allies and enemies alike start taking cracks at him — a thing they would never have done if it hadn't been for Cuba. He mentioned England, France, Poland and certain Latin American countries as examples.

He and Jackie went to bed about 10:30 p.m.

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Sunday, April 30
Glen Ora

No one called the President for church this morning until about ten minutes before Mass time. He burst into my room and asked why I hadn't wakened him — which of course was silly.

During lunch after church — he told us that he was exceedingly unimpressed with Eisenhower — that Eisenhower was completely uninformed, but that he (Eisenhower) was rather pleased that all the troubles inherited from him had come to roost with the new Administration, because it makes Eisenhower look better. Of course, Laos, Cuba and Vietnam are problems that were built in the last Administration. The President said he was hopeful that this was clearly pointed out by the press. I asked him

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about Hoover. He said he was extremely quiet and reserved but backed him 100%. He said he is probably a little slower than he had been.

threw President Kennedy hates to read the news — paper editorials, etc. now — as he finds it depressing. In fact, when he saw a recent copy of *Time* magazine, he it into the fire to avoid reading it — he was rather funny about the whole thing.

All during the weekend, he said he certainly wasn't interested in a second term — that this was the most unpleasant job existant. I told him that I heard that the Vice President's every action was based on 1968. He said he could have it in 1964.

When we talked about his library he said he didn't think anyone would be interested in building

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it as this looked like it would be a rather tragic Administration.

I have painted a rather discouraged attitude on his part. This is not entirely true. He had his same wonderful sense of humor during the entire weekend — all during the weekend he was constantly on the telephone with Secretary Rusk and Senator Mansfield, etc. He decided to go up to Washington at 5:30 and called for a meeting at the White House at once.

After lunch we chipped shots on the lawn. He was very good — I was lousy — so he took a good deal of time showing me what I did wrong and before long I was hitting quite well. He has never been able to believe that I am as badly coordinated as I really am and he's always trying to improve me in sports involving a ball.

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May 6, 1961

The President arrived at Glen Ora about 6:30 pm from Washington by car — the weather being extremely bad. He has had a very good week in comparison to the last. The minimum wage bill passed in the House, Sheppard's flight was a success and there has been a cease fire in Laos. To top it all, his Gallup popularity poll is the highest of all time — 83% approve. It seems that his popularity has grown with the Cuban fiasco. I asked him what he would have done had there been no cease fire in Laos. He said, who knows — apparently all his General staff had advised intervention — his experience with Cuba — made him examine their recommendations very thoroughly.

We played backgammon after dinner — he beat
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me three games for \$18.00...he was very pleased and decided he had gotten much better at the game. Actually he had some very lucky throws. He asked me if I would like to go to Paris — he might have been kidding in that when I inquired if I would be able to attend the big dinner and entertainment at Versailles — he said he didn't think that would be possible. I would like to go anyway and will check with him again on this. He isn't too happy with the prospect of so many of his family over there — Mrs. Kennedy, Lee, Pat, and Jean. He told me to tell Jean not to come if Pat plans to say over.

He went to bed around 10:30.

May 7, 1961

I had breakfast downstairs with the President about 10:00 a.m. He wasn't too happy to note that the AP had indicated that everyone wanted

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to get into Sheppard's act including the President. He remarked if the flight had been a failure — he would have been placed in the act fast enough. He told us that the Udall affair was rather unfair and that instead of criticizing him he had telephoned Udall and told him not to worry about it. He did mention Herbie Klotz's letter to the Commerce Department stating all news releases should build up the President. He thought that was stupid. He objects strongly to stupid mistakes, but doesn't mind ones like Udall's where the intent was right. He also wasn't too happy about Bobby's speech in Georgia — he said it wouldn't do him any good to bring that kind of civil rights talk directly into the heart of the South.

He called Chester Bowles to find out about Laos

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apparently they have resumed fire presumably because they cannot decide on a location of a meeting. The President said this was not a good reason to have the talks break down and if they break down it should be for a more important reason. He's looking for a man to specialize for the State Department in Latin America. Nelson Rockefeller had recommended his cousin Aldrich (of IBEC). He thought him not tough enough. Apparently they are now looking at someone named Gardner who has been highly recommended by the intellectuals. He informed Bowles this wasn't enough — that we would find out more about him from the administrative point of view — to see how tough he is.

We hit some golf balls — I still hit rather well after my lessons of last week. They have mowed

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the clover field so that the balls won't be so difficult to find — however, we only have four balls left. Caroline is crazy about her father and follows him everywhere. He's most interested in the fact that his dog Charlie "takes but never gives." The dog has no interest in any particular person — least of all the President.

We attended Mass with Jackie and afterwards his two helicopters picked him up to take him and about ten Secret Service men to Senator Byrd's for lunch.

The President returned from Senator Byrd's around 4:00 p.m. Caroline joined us and we went to the stables to feed Macaroni and Tex some carrots. Caroline and I each led a pony up to the paddock. Caroline had Tex and of course he pulled away. The next half hour was

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spent in trying to catch Tex. We gave up. When Jackie returned from her ride, she caught him with ease through patience and some oats.

We hit golf balls for around an hour. He told me Senator Byrd had been extremely pleased and flattered to have him come over — even though Bobby had blasted out on civil rights the day before. He said he had had a very boring seat at luncheon between Byrd's two daughters-in-law. He had aroused their anger and indignation by joking with a young girl from Smith who was sitting across from him.

That evening before dinner he examined the Parke Benet catalogue thoroughly and said if he had the time and money he would attend all the auctions. He told Jackie that she should

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get at least one possession from every President for the White House.

At dinner we talked about Jackie's plans for cruising the Aegean. She can't decide who to include on the yacht — possibly Lee and Stash, Franklin Roosevelt and Susan — Jackie Astor.

said After dinner, we played backgammon. We discussed his weight and agreed on a bet that I should lose ten pounds and he seven by his birthday May 29. He told me again that he probably wouldn't run in '64. He feels things can't get better — that the Communists will constantly be making inroads by creating crises in all parts of the world. He believes they will be tougher and tougher. I I couldn't believe he would like to turn

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over the country to Lyndon. He agreed this would be bad as he hasn't been too impressed with Lyndon in the different crises that have come up to date.

asked Jackie asked him if the same situation existed in his case as in Eisenhower — if he had his own Vice President as a candidate for President, would he support Lyndon like Eisenhower did Nixon. He said in the first place he didn't think Eisenhower supported Nixon at all — he doesn't think Eisenhower even likes or admires Nixon. He thought this was pretty clear in the campaign particularly when Eisenhower said facetiously that he would have to be given a couple of weeks to think of any important decision Nixon took part in in Government. He said he would give more support to Lyndon than Eisenhower did Nixon. We

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him how he could say that, when he had said previously that he didn't think his judgement was good. He said he assumed he would be better qualified four years from now than he is now.

Later when we were discussing Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., he said perhaps it would be a good idea to give the Secretary of the Navy, Connally, the CIA job and give Franklin the Navy job. Apparently that's what Franklin wants.

May 8, 1961

We took the helicopters back Monday morning to Washington arriving half hour before Commander Sheppard's helicopter arrived. What happened at the White House that morning has been adequately covered by the press.

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SOHIER: Just to sort of wind up Glen Ora.... I don't know, maybe it's one of the minor details, but what would he eat for breakfast?

BILLINGS: Well, he ate in his room.

SOHIER: Oh, he ate breakfast in his room.

BILLINGS: Yes, but I'm trying to think about his typical breakfast. I should know. Well, a regular old breakfast.... you know, eggs and bacon and all that.

SOHIER: Well, is there anything more about the Glen Ora weekend that you can think of? We may come back to particular incidents that occurred but in terms of the life at Glen Ora.

BILLINGS: Of course they used to have people over for lunch. For instance, Bartlett and his wife Martha would come down. They wouldn't stay there but they would come down either for Sunday lunch or for Saturday lunch or for Sunday supper. He quite often had friends come or his sisters, or maybe Bobby and Ethel. If the girls came down, they were driven by car. An unselfish side of Jack is the fact that

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he permitted Snake Mountain to be built.

SOHIER: Well, how did that develop?

BILLINGS: That was its original name you know.

SOHIER: Jackie didn't name it until after his death. And she called it "Wexford."

BILLINGS: That was named after his death. "Wexford" comes from the name of the country in Ireland where I think his family came from. But even more important, it was the name of his favorite song which was "The Boys from Wexford," an Irish patriot song, one of their very important patriot songs. We heard it when we were over there. It all developed because the lady who owned Glen Ora wanted her place back. The rent was quite high there anyway. Jackie felt that Middleburg was where she wanted to be and this was where their country house should be. Jackie talked him into it, quite obviously, because God only knows, he didn't want it. He didn't like horses particularly, he liked the water — there was nothing for him to do there.

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SOHIER: Well, did you hear the discussions? I mean, was this a very reluctant move on his part?

BILLINGS: Jackie usually got what she wanted with him.

SOHIER: Why? Because it wasn't worth the...

BILLINGS: Well, because it wasn't worth any problems with Jackie. Jackie had discovered his Achilles heel which was the fact that he couldn't stand sulkers. I discovered that thirty years ago and it doesn't take long to discover that if you know somebody well. He just couldn't stand anybody around him sulking. He'd rather do anything than have a sulker around. Unlike most people, he wouldn't say "to hell with you" and walk away from a sulker. He always tried to talk you out of sulking. And so he was really a sucker for this kind of treatment. I don't know that Jackie intentionally used this but, boy, with her sulking she always almost got her way on the material things. And she wanted a house, she liked Middleburg and she'd had an idea that she could build a little house for next to nothing. She had this

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friend down there who was a very good rider, he's sort of a professional rider in a way. I've forgotten his name, but he's the one who helps her buy horses. His wife was a good friend of hers. Jackie got the idea that this guy was a good builder and by doing the contracting he could build the kind of house she wanted for \$40,000. She convinced the President that this was possible. Of course, that was pretty naive, too, because...

SOHIER: Well, I remember the plan of the house came out in the newspapers with a price tag of something like \$40,000 and everybody among the people that build houses around town thought, boy, are they wrong...

BILLINGS: The President wasn't too interested in construction costs, and of course, he knew that normally a house like that would be much more, but she convinced him that having a man who would spend all his time just going out and getting the right prices and all that could get the job done at that price. Of course when the house ended up costing over \$100,000, the friend said he hadn't taken into consideration the fact that he'd have to have

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union labor.

SOHIER: Union labor?

BILLINGS: Of course. Imagine building a house for the President of the United States without using union labor. So that wasn't too smart. I mean, when he originally set up the price of \$40,000, he hadn't taken that into consideration.

SOHIER: Did the President show any interest in the house, the plans, etc.?

BILLINGS: Oh, yes; he really did, because he was interested in everything you know. He had the most fantastically inquisitive mind on every subject, just as he

was interested in the horses that were purchased even though he never rode at all. He was interested in every detail of the house even in the kind of wallpaper that was chosen, etc. They bought the property from the Phipps. It was a beautiful piece of property. They really did get a wonderful piece of property and they built this fantastic house, easily worth \$100,000 — as it was a big house.

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SOHIER: Did he like it once it was built?

BILLINGS: He was only in it, I would say, for about three weekends.

SOHIER: I guess it was just that one Fall.

BILLINGS: That one Fall and that's all. It had been finished the summer of 1963. They rented it that summer you know, before they had ever lived in it themselves.

SOHIER: That was another very surprising thing.

BILLINGS: The reason for that was the fact that Jack was in complete shock about its cost and he was fed up about it. Remember \$100,000 was just the cost of the house, and they must have had at least \$30,000 in the land or more, and then Jackie built a big stable.... I don't know its cost.... and of course there was a hell of a long road to the house. I mean, it was a very, very long road.

SOHIER: So when you say \$100,000, that's just the house.

BILLINGS: Yes, I'm sure that he ended up spending

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over \$100,000. I don't know what she sold it for but....

SOHIER: What was his attitude towards money, I mean in a thing like that?

BILLINGS: Well, he was very tight. That's one thing about him. He was very close with a buck.

SOHIER: He didn't follow money though very closely, did he?

BILLINGS: No, he didn't, and he didn't normally worry about it but he was close with a buck. I don't know how he worked this out with Jackie because I think Jackie would spend money like there was no tomorrow, but again I'm sure he just gave in to her. I remember one time he was awfully mad at me — just before the

Inauguration. He was away when the first offer came in to buy his Georgetown house. They had about \$100,000 in it which at that time was a great deal of money for that house. Of course today that's nothing, but remember that was 1960. It wasn't a particularly attractive house and not very big. Over \$100,000 was a good deal for that kind of a house with very little property and so

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the first offer we had was \$105,000 and I thought it was fantastic. Everybody said that the only reason he was offered that much was because he was President and the people probably wanted to live in the President's house. I said to Jackie, "God, it's terrific" and so Jackie wired him and he said, "Fine." Well, unfortunately, after he had already committed the house he was offered \$110,000.

SOHIER: You mean that made a big difference to him?

BILLINGS: He was really mad at me about it. Actually, it would be better to say that he was irritated with me over that transaction. He said I cost him \$5,000 and he didn't like it.

SOHIER: Now, he must have spent a lot of money over and above his allowance in running all these various places and running the White House.

BILLINGS: Well, he didn't even take his salary you know as President.

SOHIER: I think he took the allowance to run the

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household.

BILLINGS: Well, he probably took the allowance but he didn't take the 100 thousand salary he received as President.

SOHIER: I remember when Jackie...

BILLINGS: No, I'm wrong. He took it and picked his own charity for it — that's what he did, but he gave it away.

SOHIER: Jackie told me once that he was sort of anxious to try to live within the allowance or as nearly as possible.

BILLINGS: Well, I'm sure he tried but he probably never did, because actually Jack was like so many rich men who are tight. You know on little things he was tight, little noticeable things which would irritate him — on the big things he really wasn't.

SOHIER: You mean a little bit like turning out the light in the cellar.
BILLINGS: Well, like Johnson turning out the lights — he didn't do that but it's...

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SOHIER: His mother used to be a big light-turner-outer.

BILLINGS: Jack wasn't like that at all. I mean he just didn't like to spend money on little things. He was very much in the habit of spending a hell of a lot of money on his career, you know, so that was spent like there was no tomorrow. When he died he had used up all his cash.

SOHIER: What do you mean by that?

BILLINGS: Well, I think each one of the children had a certain amount of capital in liquid cash — I mean each child had some capital above and beyond their income from the trusts and he had spent all of that. He didn't have any cash. It was a considerable amount of dough. He spent that all on his own campaign.

SOHIER: Was he happier in the house on Snake Mountain than in Glen Ora?

BILLINGS: As I said, we were only there.... I was there two weekends and I would say he was there maybe three. It was so brand new that he was rather excited about it and remember,

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unlike Glen Ora, it was his own possession. They built a big pond that was right in front of the house but it wasn't finished when he died. There were a lot of things still unfinished so he was interested in going around and looking at all the improvements, changes which were made while he was away during the week. However, that would have worn off. It was the same old Middleburg. In fact, it was even more distant from everything than Glen Ora was. It was really isolated. You couldn't see anything but trees.

SOHIER: What would he rather have done? Would he rather have stayed in Washington?

BILLINGS: Until he discovered Camp David, I think he would have rather had a place on the Chesapeake Bay. He would have liked to be near the water. At first he never ever went to Camp David since Jackie liked Middleburg so much — but after he did go there he loved it and would have liked to have gone there every weekend. There's no question about that.

SOHIER: But he would like to have left Washington anyway.

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BILLINGS: Oh, you can't stay in the White House over the weekend.

SOHIER: Why not?

BILLINGS: Well, the White House is about as cosy as a mausoleum, you know, and particularly when it empties of all its people over the weekend. It's really a lonely spot. Even the second floor is not homey and of course there is little privacy on the grounds of the White House— so you really can't get out of doors.

SOHIER: You would get a thousand people out there...

BILLINGS: Well, not only that, but you're awfully far from the out of doors. You're really in an apartment — an apartment house that happens to have a lawn and what do you do on that lawn?

SOHIER: Is that the way he felt about it?

BILLINGS: I'm sure he felt it was a wonderful place to live during the week — probably no one lives more luxuriously or with more comforts. He often said that you can't live better than the President of the United States lives.

He loved the

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White House, but during weekends he needed a change of pace. After all, the White House was practically his office. It was essential that he get away. I don't think he ever stayed at the White House during a weekend with the exception, of course, of the weekend of the Cuban missile crisis.

SOHIER: Now, what about Camp David?

BILLINGS: He loved Camp David. I mean, there's a hell of a difference between Camp David and Middleburg. I even liked Camp David. Now, look, I had to spend a lot of time by myself at Glen Ora and I didn't have anything to do at Glen Ora — I was bored there.

SOHIER: Why was Camp David better?

BILLINGS: Camp David never bored me. I'm sure it is the same with him. There were so many things to do. Camp David is enormous. It has a whole lot of soldiers there, you know, and it has many different types of facilities.

Have you ever been to Camp David?

SOHIER: No.

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BILLINGS: In the first place, the President's house is awfully nice. A great, big log house, very comfortable and pleasant with large terraces overlooking its own golf course. The latter was built during the Eisenhower administration.

SOHIER: You mean there's an actual golf course?

BILLINGS: Well, no, it's not an actual golf course. It has four short holes but it's sort of a big miniature golf but with an iron you can have some fun. It has trees and it has greens.

SOHIER: Did he play that?

BILLINGS: I think what it is, is four approaches to the same green. Again, you know he had an awful concern about hurting his back. But he'd watch us play golf. All of his guests, anybody there, would always go and fiddle around on that and he enjoyed watching that. It was right out in front of the house. He drove himself all over the camp in his own little cart. There was a bowling alley and we used to go there. Again, he didn't play but he could watch us play. There

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were pool tables and then there was a terrific outdoor heated swimming pool in which you could swim all year around. We could swim on the coldest days there and he'd swim there at least twice a day when he was at Camp David — we spent hours in that pool.

SOHIER: How long could he swim?

BILLINGS: Oh, for hours we'd...

SOHIER: Really swim or just sort of...

BILLINGS: He never really swam, just sort of conscientiously crawled from one end to the other.

SOHIER: Oh, he didn't do that?

BILLINGS: No.

SOHIER: Was that bad for his back, or just not interesting to him.

BILLINGS: Not interesting to him, I guess.

SOHIER: Well, he was a good swimmer at one point anyway.

BILLINGS: Yes, he was very good, particularly his backstroke, but he didn't do it. He just sort of fiddled around. I think mainly

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it was sort of a breaststroke kind of thing back and forth. And just talking.

SOHIER: So it wasn't a sort of serious thing with him?

BILLINGS: Oh, no; lots of talk, talking all the time.

SOHIER: Well, where did he get his exercise?

BILLINGS: Well, that's exercise — he would stay in there for hours. He didn't get much exercise. As we discussed before, he had his formal exercises for his back. He did work out with the Chief every day. Then there was a shooting range there and we used that a lot. None of us were good shots. I don't believe any of the friends he brought to Camp David were. He didn't shoot himself because...

SOHIER: The gun against his shoulder.

BILLINGS: He just couldn't afford to get his back out of shape.

SOHIER: Well, now, did Jackie enjoy that at all — or did she go on those trips?

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BILLINGS: Jackie didn't.... yes, of course she went on them and I think that she did it because of him, you know, she didn't like it much. I'm guessing, but I'm sure she didn't. I mean, she went on them but she doesn't like to go and sit in the pool all day, in the hot pool, and she doesn't particularly want to shoot — and she doesn't want to play golf. But you know, she had the kids. I know Jackie didn't like it as well as Glen Ora; that's why they went to Glen Ora more than they went to Camp David. He would have gone to Camp David every weekend. I must say the rifle range was really fun.

SOHIER: It was a pigeon ranger rather than a rifle range?

BILLINGS: Yes, excuse me, it was a clay pigeon range Eisenhower had built it. Eisenhower must have spent about a million dollars on Camp David. You know, he used it a lot and he went hog-wild building sport facilities. I for

one was glad he did. Teddy and Jim Reed and Rip Horton and myself were there one weekend. That was another nice

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thing about Camp David — he could put up a lot of people for the weekend — not just me as he did at Glen Ora.

SOHIER: Did he have a lot of people there?

BILLINGS: Oh, he had a lot of people because you had five or six houses up there.

SOHIER: Oh, I see, and you had separate...

BILLINGS: You didn't sleep in the house with the President. You slept in your own house with a living room and a bedroom and a bath. You ate at his house even though some of the houses had their own kitchens. The first time we used the shooting range, the President said, "Okay now, we'll put a team together here: you four will shoot against the Secret Service." Well, the Secret Service was horrified because they don't shoot normally with shotguns — and are not necessarily good at it.

SOHIER: So it was really a question of their reputation?

BILLINGS: These guys had a reason to be horrified, since they were lousy. We were lousy and they were lousy with

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the exception of one of them. One of them obviously had had a lot of experience with shotguns.

SOHIER: Did the President sit back and make cracks about it?

BILLINGS: He really enjoyed it — everyone was so bad — but fortunately the Secret Service won because of that one guy.

SOHIER: Did he kid the Secret Service?

BILLINGS: A little, but in a nice way — they all loved him. There were so many things you could do at Camp David. Sometimes we would take the helicopter and go to visit the different Civil War battlefields in the area. I remember we did this on two different weekends — once, of course, it was Gettysburg. We went to two other battlefields — each weekend we would go to a different battlefield. You know, he was a real nut on the Civil War and he knew as much about the Civil War as anybody. He had

done a great deal of reading about it, therefore he was frightfully interested in seeing all the different sites of the different battles. I...

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always felt it was too bad he couldn't spend more time there. But that's sort of an unselfish side of him, isn't it, that he went to Glen Ora instead.

SOHIER: Yes. Again, you were talking about reading, how many books would he read in a weekend? Would he do a lot of reading then?

BILLINGS: Oh, read all the time, as you know; he never stopped reading and...

SOHIER: He seemed to retain a good deal of what he read.

BILLINGS: Oh, he had a fantastic ability of retention. I've never seen anything like it. This was much more than just the fact that he read a lot or could read fast. It was his ability to retain. I think the secret of it must have been his complete ability to concentrate and to absolutely lose himself in what he was reading. And that must be the secret because he had this fantastic power of concentration.

SOHIER: Is there anything more to discuss about Camp Daivd or should we move on?

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BILLINGS: No, I think that we've covered it.

SOHIER: Well, then, I guess a little later in the season, come the Spring, it was the Cape, wasn't it?

BILLINGS: Yes, every weekend we would go to the Cape and of course it was so pleasant there as compared to the days before he was President. The Cape has always been a place most difficult to reach during a weekend. The commercial planes never made a trip without some awful delay. In my case, after he was President, I would take the shuttle down to Washington, go to the White House and we would be picked up by helicopter there — flown to Andrews and take Air Force One to Otis on the Cape. From there we would helicopter right to his father's front lawn. Of course, he had always loved the Cape and was completely happy there. Things had changed a little after his marriage. In the old days of course, everybody, no matter whether they were married or not, always ate together usually at that big house, Mr. Kennedy's house. Jackie was the first one to state that she really didn't want to eat every meal with the family and complained bitterly

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to Jack about it so that's when the family began to break up. After that there might be as many as three dinners being served at three different houses. After he was President — everyone used to wonder who would be asked to eat at the President's house.

SOHIER: Did he decide who was invited or did Jackie?

BILLINGS: He and Jackie decided it. Of course if you were staying at his house you would always be invited. Of course he went out on his father's yacht, the *Marlin*, every day. Just because the *Marlin* was going out didn't mean all the family and their guests would be invited. Before he was President, or maybe the early years of his Presidency, we did all go out in the *Marlin*. If Jackie brought the food, she would only bring enough for those privileged people whom she had asked. The rest of us would bring our own food and sit up in the bow.

SOHIER: What about the *Honey Fitz*? Wasn't it up there? Didn't it come up to the Cape?

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BILLINGS: I don't remember the *Honey Fitz* being at the Cape very much. I guess that's because the *Marlin* was there.

SOHIER: Didn't Mr. Kennedy pretty much decide who was on the *Marlin*, or how did it work?

BILLINGS: During the early part of the Presidency, Mr. Kennedy didn't use the *Marlin* much when the President wanted it. Of course after he was sick he used it all the time and the President usually went with him.

SOHIER: Well, I guess we'll start talking about the *Honey Fitz* so we might terminate this particular tape and not get into this because I guess there are a lot of anecdotes and so on, that relate to the *Honey Fitz*.

THIS IS THE END OF THE TENTH INTERVIEW.

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