

Barbara J. Coleman Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 01/19/1968
Administrative Information

Creator: Barbara J. Coleman

Interviewer: John F. Stewart

Date of Interview: January 19, 1968

Place of Interview: Washington D.C.

Length: 31 pages

Biographical Note

Coleman was a journalist, a White House press aide (1961-1962), a member of Robert Kennedy's Senate staff, and presidential campaign aide (1968). In this interview she discusses Pierre Salinger's press operations during the 1960 primaries and the presidential campaign, the Democratic National Convention, and Salinger's relationship with the Kennedy administration, among other issues.

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Barbara J. Coleman, recorded interview by John F. Stewart, January 19, 1968, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Barbara Coleman
Barbara Coleman

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Barbara J. Coleman—JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

With

BARBARA J. COLEMAN

January 19, 1968
Washington, D. C.

By John F. Stewart

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STEWART: Why don't we just start by my asking you how you happened to join the staff of Senator Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. Was it in November, 1959?

COLEMAN: I joined—and I actually didn't join his Senate staff, although I didn't know what I was joining at the time. I was working for the *Washington Post* as a reporter, and I was a very beginning reporter, and I was getting tired of writing obituaries. My major in college had been political science, and I always wanted to do some sort of combination of political work and writing. So I went up to Capitol Hill to look around, to talk to different senator's offices. I had no idea of how you got a job on the Hill. I just was going to go from office to office. And I think John Kennedy's office is the first one I went to. At any rate, I was looking for candidates. I was looking for people who looked like likely candidates, and people I'd be interested in. And, Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln], his secretary, was the person I met, and she said there wasn't anything in the office, but there was a temporary job down at this other building they had. I said, "Well, that might be interesting." She said it was with Pierre Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger], the press secretary. I went down to see him. He wanted somebody to just type lists of newspapers to go on a mailing system. And he only wanted somebody for six weeks. Well, I told him that I was working at the paper in the afternoons—I didn't go to work till 2 o'clock—and that I could come in every morning for six days a week and make up the time that way, and I'd like to do it, and then

we could see. Actually, I thought in my mind that it was a conflict of interest, and if the *Post* had found out I was doing it, I would have been fired. So soon after I started with him on that basis, I turned in my notice at the *Post* because I figured that he only had a secretary then, a woman who had been with him for some time, and I thought he was going to need more help, and he'd probably keep me on. I just sort of gambled, and he did.

STEWART: You were actually working on these lists though, for a period of time, just . . .

COLEMAN: I don't remember if it took six weeks, and I think I probably had other things to do, even from the beginning. They didn't have very many files set up. This was in the Esso Building. I believe they had started organizing the Esso Building about, oh, maybe three, four months before that. Sometime in the springtime Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] arranged for the space. The first time I saw some news article on it was, I think, in September, when somebody sort of blew the cover. So I had all kinds of things to do. The Senator was going off on trips to different states then, and material had to be prepared before he went on trips, or speeches had to be typed, and sometimes we would help people in the Senate office with that kind of work, typing work. And then there were newspaper queries and newspapermen for who arrangements had to be made on these trips, hotels and that kind of thing. So there was a lot of that right from the beginning.

STEWART: How soon, do you recall, did you start to get a feeling for just what was going on, that this was one big push for the nomination? For example, did you get to meet the people in the Senate office also?

COLEMAN: Nothing was ever structured very neatly in terms of being introduced around or even knowing who you were working with. You got to meet them when you had to do something with them, pretty much. Like, if a speech had to be sent out, if the Senator was going on a Friday afternoon to make a trip, there'd always be a last minute race, and we'd go up to the Senate office and perhaps help out right in there. You'd get to see or talk to sometimes Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorenson], or somebody else working on a trip, but it was always very casual. Nobody would even introduce you, or he might not even know who you were. I remember the first time I met the Senator; he was getting some sort of an award. It was kind of a human relations type award. I've forgotten exactly what it was. But we wanted to do a press release on it, and Pierre sent me up to the Senator's office to get the details on it. Well, I'd never met the Senator, and I went in the office, and this little

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ceremony took place. The Senator turned around and said to me, "And who do you work for?" He thought I was a reporter covering it. So I just said, "Well, I work for you, Senator," and introduced myself, and that was the way I met him. That was probably a month or two after I'd been working for him. But he didn't come down to that Esso Building office then. We mostly knew the people in the Esso Building, and they were coming on. More people were being hired all the time. It was really a fairly small staff when I first came in there. I don't think I ever got to know

the people in the Senate office very well until, I would guess until, probably sometime into the next year, when we actually worked in the Senate office for a while, in the special session.

STEWART: Pierre Salinger in his book comments on the fact that there was a certain uneasiness when he first became the press secretary because he was taken in, so to speak, as an outsider, and there was a certain amount, not of really friction, I guess, but just uneasiness about accepting him into the people who had been around Kennedy before. Did you get any of this, or did you have any of this feeling?

COLEMAN: Not myself. He related that feeling. He'd be particularly nervous when something went wrong in those first couple of months that I was there. Before the Senator was ready to officially announce that he was a candidate, a letter got out, and there was a lot of newspaper coverage of that. And if something like that would happen, Pierre would walk around sort of shaking his head, saying, "Oh, I don't know if I'm going to be around here much longer." And you could tell that he wasn't too secure in his relationship with the Senator, that he didn't know him that well, and didn't know quite what to expect from him. But I don't know that we had any special feeling that we were one group and the Senate staff was another. I think they, the Senate staff, the people who were around there, the people like Sorensen, in most of our opinion, were the insiders. There was just no question about it; they were the ones who were writing the speeches and making a lot of the decisions. Of course, Steve Smith was the one making the major decisions in the Esso Building, and, of course, he was an insider, too.

STEWART: How much did you know, say around November, December, January of 1960, as to exactly what major plans they had, for example, as to primaries, and what their thinking was in the overall course of the campaign?

COLEMAN: It was pretty clear. That was one of the advantages of working in something like a press office—you always knew what was going on in a press office, as much as you knew

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from what Pierre would say, or as much as you could glean from what he would say to reporters. You knew that the Wisconsin primary was considered very important; you knew what polls were being taken; you knew how those polls would go from time to time from the feeling you could see. But there was always a lot of pressure right from the start. It wasn't as if one primary was going to make or break it. The Wisconsin primary was the first big primary so that was the concentration. After that one, because he didn't do quite as well—and there was a feeling that he hadn't done that well in that primary in certain areas, that he had to prove the Catholic issue in West Virginia—so the West Virginia thing got very intense. I wasn't in the West Virginia primary, actually, in the state at all. A lot of people were. And I was in the Wisconsin primary for a couple of weeks so my view of it's a little bit different. I saw a great deal of effort and tension in the Wisconsin primary that I'm sure existed in the West Virginia primary even more

so, but I wasn't present in the state. A lot of the people were sent to West Virginia, compared to who went to Wisconsin, although as Wisconsin went on, more and more people came out.

STEWART: You say he, of course, was meeting and talking to reporters constantly. Did you people who were working for him do any of this? When reporters would drop in, would you talk to them at any time or was it always a matter of turning them over to Pierre?

COLEMAN: No, it was always turning them over to Pierre. They wouldn't expect to find out what they wanted to know from us. Pierre, I think, had a very good relationship with the press right from the start. I think he was as frank as he could be on lots of occasions. I think a lot of them liked him. Their interest, of course, and the amount of attention they'd pay to John Kennedy became more considerable as each month went by. But he had a lot of queries; he had a lot of press attention right from the start. Most of his day, if he was in town, was spent on the phone or seeing people, constantly backgrounding them on things. But they would get from us only the kinds of sort of background material we could provide them with, in terms of history of the Senator's family, or his children's ages, or what size shoe Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline B. Kennedy] wore—I remember that came up once—that kind of thing. Then I developed a photo file, and so I'd fill queries, either written or telephoned or something, or try to give them photographs whenever they wanted it, for different things. We never really had an elaborate—either photo file or background file—on him or anything. We kept a speech file, and we kept certain material, biographies.

STEWART: Was this photo file, for example, done totally new from scratch, or was it an extension of what someone had in

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the Senate office, or was it taken from there?

COLEMAN: We went everywhere to get things. I don't remember whether they actually did have a photo file in the Senate office, but we must have gotten some things from them. We got some family photos; we got things that were taken during his campaigning which he had already done. It was sort of built up gradually, but I think we had very little to go on. I remember somewhere or other we turned up a scrapbook of the Senator's with a lot of photos and comments and things from letters from his college days. I found it fascinating reading myself. I don't know what happened to it. To this day I still don't know where that scrapbook went to, or where it came from, for that matter. We must have lost it. Every time I think about it, I think of it with horror because I really have no idea what happened to anything after the Senator was nominated at the convention. The Democratic National Committee took over a lot of things for us, but I sometimes think of all those personal photos and letters and things we had around that we didn't even know what to do with.

STEWART: Most of the things from the campaign, and if these were somehow worked into those, wound up at the Archives, in fairly good shape, I think. Did you do any traveling at all? Pierre was traveling right from the start . . .

COLEMAN: He went out almost. . . . Let's see, I came on in November, and the senator took a Christmas holiday over the Christmas vacation, so there wasn't so much those first few months. But in January, I know, and from then on, it was every weekend. They would go out on Friday, depending on the Senate's schedule, but almost certainly on Friday, then for the whole weekend, to New Hampshire and then Wisconsin. I don't remember the New Hampshire primary very much at all. I don't remember how much he went up there. I remember starting with the Wisconsin primary. Well, actually, I went out to Wisconsin in February, I guess, yeah, sometime in February so that's probably why I didn't know what campaigning he was doing in New Hampshire. And I was out in Wisconsin for about two weeks. Unfortunately I got sick, and we were in a campaign headquarters that left a lot to be desired. It was across from Marquette University. It was not the one they ended up in; they later moved. But the day the bathroom overflowed I was sick and that was the last straw, I'm afraid. I went back, and they never sent me out again until the campaign proper. I was afraid I showed too much weakness, and I wouldn't get sent out anymore after that.

STEWART: Who were you out there with?

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COLEMAN: Well, Chuck Roche [Charles D. Roche] had been hired then, and he was to do press work in Milwaukee, and I was sent out to help him. Jerry Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] was out there. That's where I first met Jerry, and I've known him since then. He was at that headquarters. Jerry was there, and Kenny O'Donnell [P. Kenneth O'Donnell] went out about the same time I did. I don't remember whether he stayed, but he was to be in Madison. I know one weekend, I think, we went over to Madison overnight, Kenny and Chuck and I, to see what they were setting up there. But mostly I was working on press things again with Chuck.

STEWART: In getting the whole Esso Building operation going, do you recall either yourself or anyone else having any contact with any of the staff people who had gone through this before, either with Kefauver [C. Estes Kefauver] or with Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson]? You know this, relating to the whole question that here were a group of people, really none of whom had been through a presidential campaign before. I know there was a certain amount of contact with a few people who had worked, for example, for Kefauver, you know, on some of the mechanics of just setting up a nomination campaign.

COLEMAN: I don't remember it; I don't remember anybody. You know, if somebody were to tell me now, to mention a name, maybe I'd remember seeing him around. So many people in Washington always know so many other people in

Washington that I can't believe there weren't times when they just knew people and had lunch with them and picked up what they could that way. But I don't know specific people who might have done it.

STEWART: Can you think of any leaks that occurred from the Esso Building among the staff that were of a serious nature at all?

COLEMAN: I don't remember if we ever pinned down how that letter got out, but I don't think that was our fault. I think the letter had gone out to people around the country, Democratic Party people who were supposed to be sympathetic to John Kennedy's possible candidacy and I think one of them must have blown it. I remember for some strange reason it was a UPI [United Press International] story that got out. But Pierre swore that he didn't do it, and I don't see why he would have done it, unless he just let it go somehow accidentally. But we thought for a while it was our mimeograph operation. I don't know if you've seen him—there's a guy named Jerry Rodis, who's around town somewhere—who was working that.... And he may have been working there at that time, but we thought somehow or other that somebody from there might have—or it somehow might have gotten loose in the mailing—mimeographing section. But that was the only time that....

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After that he was an announced candidate so it wasn't that tricky.

And then there were other kinds of flaps. I suppose there were ones from time to time, except I don't remember. The only thing I remember from the West Virginia primary is the question of the money spent there, and how much money was spent by the Kennedys. And there was something involving Steve being a sort of bag man going around distributing money. But that's the only major thing that I can remember.

STEWART: Do you recall any real tension among the staff, not initially, maybe but in the early part of 1960?

COLEMAN: Oh yeah, I think there was, I think there was from people, as you said before, uncertain about their relationship to the Senator and to the people who'd come before. I think that's very true of Pierre, and I think, he would say that. I think, you know, it went on into the White House. And it was those who were there first, kind of. I think Pierre's relationship with some of the people, some of the other men always remained to some degree strained. Maybe that's a little bit strongly put, a slight strain, but at any rate, it was to some degree uncomfortable—who was telling the president or the candidate what and who he should listen to. Pierre's whole way of entering the picture was so different from all the other men. It wasn't just that he hadn't worked for the Senator or President before, but that he was a newspaperman, that he was a very funny fellow, you know, and so maybe you don't take him as seriously as you take some of the others. I think that happened from time to time—I mean I'm sure it did—and I can't remember any specific incidents. I could probably remember some in the White House better than I can in the campaign.

Then there were a lot of people coming on constantly, too, and that always....I remember several who came on, and I think the people who were already there had differing opinions of how well they worked. We had a lot of changing around in the press office. We had several men come into the press. We had Chuck Roche, and we had Ron Linton [Ronald M. Linton], and we had, oh gosh, who's that...

STEWART: This is in the whole period before the Convention?

COLEMAN: Right. And we had another guy, oh, I've forgotten all about that until now, the guy who was sent out to Wisconsin and got drunk and threw a telephone out the window. Haven't you heard about that incident? Oh, it was terrible; he overflowed the water in the bathtub and did all kinds of crazy things all in this one night that he threw the telephone out the window. I can't

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remember his name. And then he called us forever after that. He was dropped, but he was rather a pathetic case.

STEWART: But he came out from Washington?

COLEMAN: Yes. He was hired at any rate in Washington. I don't remember where he was from originally. I think he was from New Jersey. And he had some press background. That was very awkward for a while.

STEWART: Were there many others who were dropped?

COLEMAN: They were shifted around a good deal. Now Chuck was shifted around. Ron was shifted around by the time the final campaign came about. Then they'd use people within the states itself. I'm trying to remember—Chuck was doing the press work in Wisconsin, and then I don't remember whether he was doing it in West Virginia. Oh, I guess Andy [Andrew T. Hatcher]—no, he didn't come on till the Convention, that's right, as did Wilson [Donald N. Wilson]. Wilson came on after the convention. Joe Lastelic [Joseph A. Lastelic] was hired for a short period. And there was Bob Wallace [Robert A. Wallace]. I can't even remember now what Bob Wallace was doing all that while there, but he was in headquarters a lot, in the Esso Building. He came on sort of late, and he sort of had a different background and different than.... Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] was, of course, there early, but Dave's whole function with the other men was sort of unclear a lot of the time. Larry [Lawrence F. O'Brien] was not around the Building much; he was traveling a good deal. My impression was that Steve's relationships with everybody were pretty good. I guess perhaps there just wasn't that competition because he was a brother-in-law, and he was in the position he was in, so there was no question of that. But actually I think in some ways maybe I was just more aware of some friction after the president was elected than during the campaign when they all had so many problems that maybe it didn't surface as much.

STEWART: Did this apparent or real lack of organization seem to be a concern to many people, or the lack of a clear understanding as to who was doing exactly what and how far they could go in doing things?

COLEMAN: No. I don't mean to suggest that there was a lack of organization because I don't really think it was that bad. I think it was clear that Steve, for instance, handled financial matters, that there was not much of a competition on that. Ted was writing speeches, by and large, and there were other people drawn in. It seems to me now, considering the kind of campaign it

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was and as many primaries as they went into, they didn't really have a lot of people. We had more people coming and going, in a way, in press or being shifted around in press than they did in some of the other functions. And you know, Kenny and Larry were doing certain things in advancing and setting up things. People like Jerry Bruno were concentrated in one state at that point so that was a fairly concentrated campaign. They would work with local people like that.

I think Pierre's only problem was that his function always overlapped everybody else's, and it's always a tricky one. He just wasn't as surefooted with it at first although considering the position he was in, which was sort of awkward, I think he picked up and got confident very quickly. I think he also said that a lot of times, as soon as he knew he got through one or two crises that he felt and knew that the Senator was not going to fire him for it.

STEWART: Aside from the trip to Wisconsin, which was the only trip you made, you say, the only extended period of time, how did your actual day-to-day functions at the Esso Building change from the period November to the Convention? Were you...

COLEMAN: They only accelerated, really, in terms of the things we were asked to provide. The number of newspapermen kept increasing with every trip. The arrangements that had to be made for them and the mechanics of getting speeches out and getting press releases out—we were constantly involved. We never really had that many people working in press. His secretary, who was Lenore Ostrow then, and I were the only ones for a while, for several months there. Then we had another girl on, helping out with some of the typing and things. But we had to do, you know, straight typing and mimeographing of things and addressing envelopes all ourselves. We had a little addressograph machine in there. We'd have to turn out these things all the time, taking press releases around to the galleries, you know, and constantly watching the Washington press as much as mailing out stuff. So we were constantly involved in rather mechanical operations and answering phones all the time and that sort of thing. And it just kept increasing in volume all the time, but that's really most of it.

STEWART: Were you doing any writing of press releases at all, or was he doing all of that?

COLEMAN: I think he must have done 99.9 per cent of them. I remember doing one or two, but very little, very little of it.

STEWART: There was a great effort made, of course, to get to know and to be of as much assistance as possible with reporters in the various cities he was going to and

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especially in the states where they were going to enter the primary. Can you think in general of the overall techniques or anything unusual that they did use in dealing with these local reporters?

COLEMAN: I only remember from the Wisconsin primary the business of having the buses provided for the reporters, a bus, I guess it was just a bus at that time provided for the reporters giving them....I remember in Wisconsin, of course, we always made up a schedule for what the Senator was going to do and where he was going to be, and then we'd tell them, if he was going to travel around somewhere, where they could pick up the bus, and if he was going to make a speech somewhere, having the advance text of his speech. I know that Chuck talked to reporters on the phone all the time. I don't remember anything special. I'm sure they did do something. I can't believe they didn't, but maybe they didn't, except before he was going out to send out advance schedules. They were always doing the schedules right up to the last minute, too, I think. The trips were so frequent it was almost impossible for us to do much advance work. I don't even remember that we made any kind of press kits or anything for reporters before a primary. I can't believe we didn't, but I don't remember them now.

STEWART: What about this big card file that got so much acclaim? Did you have anything to do with feeding information into that or . . .

COLEMAN: No, no. I knew of it. I knew the girls working on it, and I knew it was under Dave Hackett. No, we didn't. Pierre might have. I don't remember. I don't remember having anything....

STEWART: What about people who were doing stories for national magazines or major articles?

COLEMAN: Of course, they'd come in and see Pierre, and they'd want to go around on several trips. They usually got.... I used to think personally sometimes—I don't know how many others might slave through it—that Pierre was giving a lot of attention, more attention, to people for the big newspapers and wire services and magazines than a lot of the John Doe kind of reporters around. But that was sort of inevitable anyway, you know. But they would get interviews with the Senator and then sort of special treatment, if they were doing a big article, that kind of thing.

STEWART: Did you ever have any problems with pictures you may have given out that they didn't like, or that were used in a way that they didn't like?

COLEMAN: No, no. We never had enough of what people asked for. It was a very poor picture file. It was lacking in almost everything. Lots of times people would want, you know, family pictures, and all we had was a set family shot, I remember, that showed the Kennedys when they were children. We had a couple of different group pictures that we used to give out all the time, but we had very little. Even pictures of him campaigning we didn't have very much of. We had to rely on what people sent us, really, and what we came up with. But I don't remember anything being used that.... Oh, maybe, one time there was something about him when he was in college. I think there was one sort of like a private picture that got out somewhere that he wondered how it got out. But I don't even remember if we knew that we had given it out. I don't think necessarily that that was true. But I don't remember his ever.... The Senator never really objected too much in terms of publicity, I don't think.

STEWART: Did you see him any more during this whole period, or at all?

COLEMAN: No. Of course I saw him when I was in Wisconsin when he came up to campaign. On a few weekends I'd see him while we were standing outside the plant gate. He was shaking hands, and we were handing people things. It was cold. No, we didn't see much of him at all. He didn't come down to the Esso Building but once, I think, the whole time that I was there, and that was early when I worked there that he came down there.

STEWART: Were there many people coming in looking for jobs?

COLEMAN: In the press office, yeah. There were guys coming in, you know, people who had some newspaper experience who wanted to do something or other. But no, it wasn't that extensive that you couldn't.... Pierre wasn't around an awful lot, so you could just sort of turn them away or keep their resumes. We kept resumes on file for.... A couple of people were picked up one time or another. I'm trying to remember when Joe Lastelic of the *Kansas City Star* came on for a while. Was that in the campaign itself, or was that in the primary?

STEWART: I've never heard his name. Were you personally confident right from the start that he'd [John F. Kennedy] get nominated?

COLEMAN: No. But then I always seem to be wrong about.... I thought he'd do all right, I think, in the Wisconsin primary, but I thought he was going to lose the West Virginia primary. I remember wondering what I was going to do about a job then. That's all I could.... I was sure he was going to lose the West Virginia primary. I think after the West Virginia primary I thought he was going to get nominated. One time we went down to West Virginia, a group of girls went down to hear him speak at the Charlestown Racing Track

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or something. He talked to some of us. He didn't even know, you know...Some of us he had never met. He asked each one, "You work for me?" you know. But I really didn't think he was going to win.

STEWART: Was this the general attitude?

COLEMAN: Well, there was a lot of deep concern and pessimism about the West Virginia primary. I don't think during it they ever really thought that they would win that one. They really ran scared during that one. There was much more of an easy feeling in the Wisconsin situation than there was by the time it got down to West Virginia because by West Virginia, you know, it really had become critical because of Wisconsin.

STEWART: And did people right from the start speculate, or were there divisions between the optimists and the pessimists, say even before Wisconsin as to whether he could go all the way in it?

COLEMAN: No. We had, I remember, a little green tag turned up after the Wisconsin primary, that said FKBW—For Kennedy Before Wisconsin—which we all laughed about. I think people who work in political headquarters tend to be optimistic most of the time. I tend to be a pessimist so maybe that's why it came out that way. But I think most people thought the way they felt, you know.

STEWART: Had you ever been involved in a political campaign before?

COLEMAN: No. I had done some volunteer work in New York. I'm from Brooklyn, and in the Stevenson campaign in '52 or '56—I guess '56—I had done some addressing of envelopes—that type of thing. That's all I had ever done before.

STEWART: Did you find frequent situations where you didn't understand why they were doing things in a certain way, or just the general political...

COLEMAN: I suppose I think now that there was more organization than I thought. I thought the whole thing was very haphazard in a way, but I didn't know really how it could be otherwise. I think that the whole primary situation was interesting to me, that I didn't realize that a candidate had to spend that much time and money, and the problems for a man who had to establish himself through the primary route. And I think the situation in each state was fantastically interesting—that they were so different, and that the

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whole question of whether or not he could be nominated hung so much on that West Virginia primary, for instance. Of course our office was fairly well structured. You know, press offices have certain very common type of functions. And what decisions they made about how they

spent money or where they went or what kind of political people to contact, all of that was kind of removed from us to some degree, and I tend now to think that it's a shame that I didn't know more of what was going on in different sections.

I think the whole card system was fantastically interesting. I never knew that they would do something like this. I didn't have anything to compare it with: I didn't know what other candidates did. It seemed to me then that it was very practical, you know. Whether or not anybody else had ever done it, I wasn't aware of that. But I know they kept those cards with great secrecy because they were putting all kinds of stuff on them that they probably didn't want people to know they were accumulating. I wanted to see those cards, and I don't remember looking at any of them individually to see what they did have on them. I know they had the girls lock them up at the Convention. Those cards are around, I'm sure.

STEWART: Oh, yeah. You mentioned before the national magazines. There's always been a certain amount of speculation as to just how many of these major articles on the President got into major national magazines, whether it was strictly because he was such a good newsy item, or whether they got in there through some other means. Do you know anything about that?

COLEMAN: What do you mean, because they were planted, in effect planted?

STEWART: Well, not necessarily planted, because I don't think you can plant a major feature in *Time*, *Look*, or *Ladies Home Journal* or something like that. But just how did they get in there? Did they all genuinely originate from the magazine?

COLEMAN: There were a lot of articles being written about him before I even went to work for him. I know one newspaperman who wrote one for the *Saturday Evening Post*. He doesn't work for *Saturday Evening Post*, but he did one. And he did it before sometime early '59, or it might even have been '58. I know he said it was one of the first ones, and he made good contacts with the Kennedys because he was able to interview them at a time when there weren't so many others coming in. And that guy said it was because he was an attractive candidate with lots of story material about him. So I don't think there's any reason why that wouldn't be likely. I don't see why Pierre wouldn't have encouraged it, too, but I don't think you have to look for anything particularly Machiavellian in that.

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It's a question of how the stories came out. I think the Senator did as much as anybody else to make them reflect an attractive personality.

STEWART: I guess after November 1959, certainly, when you came, there was quite a different situation than, say, late '57, '58 and early '59, when very few people took his candidacy seriously. Or even then I guess there were....

COLEMAN: Well, but after '56 when he was almost nominated for vice president, there was a great deal of interest in him. I don't think whether people took him seriously or not, they were going to ignore him. Now I'm used to the idea of a wealth of material being written about possible presidential candidates way before an election year; we get it all the time. I don't think it was unusual; I think he was just good copy.

STEWART: As far as the Convention is concerned, first of all, what plans and how soon did you make definite plans for how the whole press operation was going to be set up at the Convention?

COLEMAN: Let's see, the Convention was in July. I guess in June we were planning on it. Ron was going to take on running a daily newspaper, and by that time we had the two girls from Goucher; Jill [Jill Cowan] and Priscilla [Priscilla Wear] had wandered in one day and said that they would fly themselves out there if they had something to do, so Pierre decided to give them to Ron to work out his daily newspaper.

STEWART: Whose idea was this daily newspaper, by the way? Do you know?

COLEMAN: That was Pierre's. Ron had been in the office then a few months, I guess. I don't remember when anybody came on anymore. So he got that. I don't remember anything else about that except that they decided to do that. Then Pierre was going to take on Andy and another woman who had been working in the headquarters. That was Chris [Christine Camp]. So it was going to be Chris, Lenore and I and Pierre and Andy and Ron with the newspaper and the two girls. Pierre must have gone out ahead of time to Los Angeles to look over the arrangements. I don't remember him doing that, but I'm sure he did. Yes, as a matter of fact, I think he took Chris. He and Chris went out there and looked at the arrangements and then stayed out there. I know I went out about a week or so before the Convention started with a whole bunch of other girls from the office. It wasn't just the press then; they flew a whole group of us out on the *Caroline*. Things were still a great deal unsettled at the Convention when I got there because I know they didn't have enough space, and Pierre was in one place and I know I was in another place for a while because

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I had to run off a lot of stuff and they didn't have room for a mimeograph or something. He hadn't really settled....For a while there he was going to have me handling the women's press stuff, stuff on women in the family. Mrs. Kennedy wasn't out there, Mrs. John Kennedy, but there were all the others. . . . And I did that.

STEWART: You did do that at the Convention?

COLEMAN: Yeah, well, what it consisted of, really, was at one point there, some women reporters wanted to see members of the family and everything, but it was going to be tough to arrange that because they had schedules. They had their

own schedules which I had nothing to do with. But I'd answer some questions from women reporters. Then Katie Louchheim [Kathleen Louchheim] was going to have all the wives or mothers of the candidates appear on a show one day, and I was supposed to try and get some woman in the Kennedy family, which was really... I had all kinds of trouble with that. I couldn't get any of them until I finally got up my nerve and asked Mrs. Rose Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] to do it, and she agreed to do it. Then the morning of the show I got the Senator on the phone saying, "Barbara, I don't think my mother can do this." And I thought, "Oh, my God, I'm going to have to tell Katie Louchheim there's going to be no Kennedy." Bob Troutman [Robert B. Troutman Jr.] of Atlanta still calls me Katie from that incident because every day all he remembers is my moaning and groaning and saying, "What am I going to do for a Kennedy woman? What am I going to do?" And then I decided that we were getting enough queries from the women and that really we should try to come up with some Kennedy woman to have a press conference. So I called Mrs. Rose Kennedy and just asked her to do it, and she agreed to do that, and she did have it. It went off very well.

STEWART: Well, who did appear with Katie, or didn't anybody?

COLEMAN: Nobody, nobody. No Kennedy appeared that day, and she wasn't too happy with us.

STEWART: If we could back up just a little, who was handling, or were there many inquiries from female reporters about the family and about the Kennedy women before? Was Pierre handling all this...

COLEMAN: Yeah, he handled that along with everything else. I guess again a lot of the routine queries, things we could answer, Lenore and I would answer as we got them. If there was no special reason why they wanted to specifically talk to Pierre, we would do that. We had a biography on Mrs. John Kennedy, and I think we had some material on the family as a whole, in terms of ages and things, children.

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STEWART: There was never any confusion as to just what types of information you would give out, or just how...

COLEMAN: Oh no, no. Everything was on a... You told them what you knew. You really didn't get a lot of awkward questions. I think that business about whether John Kennedy was married before was the thing that plagued us most of the time and we...

STEWART: Really? In that...

COLEMAN: Yeah, the *Blauvelt* or whatever they call that thing. Oh, yeah, we had that before the Convention. I think the major problem about that was in the spring of '60.

STEWART: Well, no, it didn't really. . . . They had the big flap with the *Daily News*, and then they eventually worked it out with Newsweek, I guess, during the administration. I think it was in 1962.

COLEMAN: Oh, but we had it before. I'm sure we had it before. I'm positive about that. I can't remember exactly when it.... Maybe it was sort of sub-surface, and I'm thinking that it was more open than that.

STEWART: Were there questions, for example, about Rosemary [Rosemary Kennedy]?

[BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I]

COLEMAN: No. We would just say, if they didn't know, if it came up, we'd just say she was in an institution in Wisconsin, I think that was what we said, something like that. I don't remember reporters probing too much for personal stuff. Sometimes they'd ask you questions about Mrs. John Kennedy, like, you know, her weight or her hair color or maybe things, personal things, like what kind of clothes she liked or something or other about her background. We probably got—I'm trying to remember whether we got much about her when we were at the Convention. I don't think so. I don't remember. I think most of the questions about the family were sort of about the family as a whole more than, you know, personal questions about each individual.

STEWART: So at the Convention, you did do more of this with women reporters. Do you remember any other incidents, or anything else that happened as far as the Kennedy women were concerned?

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COLEMAN: I remember asking Joan Kennedy [Joan Bennett Kennedy] to go on that Katie Louchheim thing, and she had not been involved in any political things with the family before, and she was so sweet about it, but she just looked like she was scared out of her wits when I suggested that maybe she should do it. She said, "I don't know if I'll know what to say," and all this.

STEWART: Was this a panel, or a...

COLEMAN: Yeah. It was a group of women, maybe Mrs. Humphrey [Muriel Buck Humphrey] and Mrs. Johnson [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson]. I don't remember which women they had, but they were supposed to be some women associated with the family pretty closely.

Of course, I hadn't dealt with the women much before because even in Wisconsin, where they were coming in a lot and holding these teas and things, they had a woman working with them. They had a woman who came from Massachusetts, who knew them very well and had done some of these tea things in Massachusetts, and she'd work on their schedules. So we rarely

got even into press queries about the women because generally somebody else was handing out that information. But I don't remember any other incidents with the women as such, other than that.

STEWART: Did you know before the Convention exactly, or fairly exactly, what you were going to be doing out there?

COLEMAN: No, no. But you knew it was going to be pretty much the same as what you had done, in terms of just working with press things and getting out press releases. Sometimes we would have even less to do, in a way, than in Washington, because people like Pierre would be constantly called on for something or other, and would sort of just keep track of everything. It's mostly just keeping alive in that swarm in there. We were in that main hotel. You could never get up and down in the elevators. I remember we were—I don't know what floor we were on—but I walked up and down a lot of times simply trying to get stuff down to the press. You know, the press was in that fishbowl thing, or whatever they called that downstairs part. You could never get down to them; you could never reach them. We were on the sixth or eighth floor or something, and the logistics of getting around that hotel were incredible.

STEWART: Did you spend your whole time right there? Did you get...

COLEMAN: Went out to the Convention hall on the night he was nominated. I didn't see him give the acceptance speech; well, I could have, as a matter of fact, I think, but I didn't. I actually got into the hall itself and saw the Stevenson demonstration. But I

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wasn't in the hall; I was in that little house like thing that they had when he was nominated.

STEWART: Again, were you totally optimistic when you went out there that it was going to go so well?

COLEMAN: Oh, no. I think one gets a little bit fatalistic after a while and doesn't really think about it so much. You think he is going to, and you just sort of assume he's going to, and you don't spend a lot of time asking yourself over and over again, is he or isn't he. I think I was pretty confident by then: that I thought by then there were enough things going in his favor.

STEWART: Do you remember any goofs of any significance at the Convention as far as the press office was concerned?

COLEMAN: They got into that business about whether he had that disease. Did Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] introduce it or somebody like that? And that was the only personal thing.

I remember one time going to Robert Kennedy's [Robert F. Kennedy] office for some reason, having to deliver something up there. And Kennedy had all these—what did they call them—the guys who were supposed to be responsible for different delegations and who were going to be on the floor with the different delegations? And Kennedy was really reading them out. He said something about that they didn't come there to play and they should be....I don't remember what prompted it, but I think it was a couple of days before the Convention started and a little bit of panic was setting in that things weren't going that well. It reminded me of like the dress rehearsal, you know, when everything seems to go wrong, even though it's going to come out fine in the end. And I think maybe some of these guys—I don't know what prompted it—but maybe some of these guys didn't know all they were supposed to have known about their delegations. He was really reading the riot act to them. That was the only really inside thing I saw of the actual strategy thing going on. Again, we always seemed to be so busy mimeographing something that I had no contact with any of the....I know O'Brien and Robert Kennedy had these officers, and I think I was only up there that one time. We couldn't get each other on the phone a lot; that was awfully difficult. And we had to spend a lot of time sort of running between these, and as I said, you couldn't get an elevator half the time, so you had to run between the different offices if you had to go see somebody. I remember I was running down one time, oh yeah, I was running up, and I ran past Jim Symington [James W. Symington] running down, and I ran past him thinking to myself, "Gee whiz, I wonder what Symington's done now." I felt sure that something was going to happen—whether Symington had made some sort of agreement with....We all had that problem

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of getting around. If you wanted to get some place fast, you generally had to run.

STEWART: Did you have any contact, or did you know any of the people working for Johnson, or Symington [Stuart Symington II], or Stevenson?

COLEMAN: No. I didn't even know where they were in the building at the time. When they'd be having press conferences, or they'd be having meetings with different delegations, I'd be going through for one reason or another and just stop and see what was going on, or something like that, but I never really knew their staff people. I think I knew them by sight; I knew some of them by sight.

STEWART: And you didn't have anything to do with the newspaper at the Convention?

COLEMAN: No, that was done someplace else; it physically was located someplace else.

STEWART: Is there anything else you can think of about the Convention?

COLEMAN: I remember. I guess we were supposed to take part in the demonstration. I guess we did take part in it. They asked us if any of us wanted to take part in the demonstration.

STEWART: Really? Just for kicks, or...

COLEMAN: Yeah, just for kicks.

STEWART: Oh.

COLEMAN: Actually we were out there, as I said. A week ahead of time, and they kind of let us do a lot of different things just for fun, like going out to a studio and providing some guys to drive us around Hollywood and that kind of thing. And then we did take part in the demonstration, if we wanted to. It was a weird scene from the floor of the...

STEWART: So it wasn't a case of working that much, you know, eighteen hours a day or anything like that, as far as you were concerned?

COLEMAN: No. Really the working conditions were poor in terms of...just it was so difficult to do anything at that Convention, to get anything done. I remember being disgruntled once or twice because I thought I spent more time mimeographing off in some little room somewhere and had no idea what was going on in the

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whole place. I had to have a television set around some place to find out what was happening. I really did. I often said that to my friend who was so unhappy because she didn't get to go to the Convention. I never saw the Convention. I really didn't have any idea until practically the day Kennedy was nominated what was going on.

STEWART: Did you have a television in your office?

COLEMAN: Pierre did, in the main office, but I was down away from him even for a while there, and I didn't know what was going on.

STEWART: Did you have much contact with Andy Hatcher?

COLEMAN: No, I never knew Andy at all. I mean, I suppose I was introduced to him at some point during the Convention but saw very little of him. I saw very little of Pierre for that matter. I really didn't get to talk to Andy at all. We went to Hyannis directly from the Convention, and I suppose I got to know him somewhat there, although Hyannis was another strange thing too because Kennedy had been nominated, and he was supposed to be, you know, sort of resting, but he kept seeing people, and we'd have people visiting. G. Mennen Williams came in one time, and then that guy from Kenya came in, Tom Mboya [Thomas J. Mboya]. And all these strange and different groups would come in to see him and then say they supported him, or something or other, or to be taken on in some capacity. The weirdest people were just wandering all through Hyannis in the couple of weeks we were there.

So I'm not even sure Andy was there, but maybe he was. But I really didn't get to know him until long after the Convention.

STEWART: Were there any celebrations after he was nominated in Los Angeles?

COLEMAN: Not from the office staff.

STEWART: ...or was it still the idea that there was a lot of work to do as far as the campaign was concerned?

COLEMAN: Well, it wasn't just that, but there was just a lot of work to do with the everyday stuff. I mean, that just made it worse in terms of the material we were expected to provide or questions you were supposed to answer or things you had to do. It always seemed like we were just going on into another day to do more things, more details of kind of....

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Then there was the business, of course, about the vice president then, and that was a shock to a lot of us. I remember I was very surprised myself and very unhappy. I was just another one of the unhappy people. I don't think it made much difference, but I was really shocked. I said something snide, I suppose, to Pierre about it, and you could tell Pierre wasn't happy, but he was taking the official line about it: that it was the thing that had to be done. I think there was a considerable letdown feeling that day. I think Pierre was unhappy but trying to...

STEWART: Do you mean just among you people or among the staff in general?

COLEMAN: Some other staff people. I don't remember specifically who, but I know there was surprise among more than just a couple, and unhappiness.

STEWART: As far as the campaign is concerned, when did you have some idea as to just what you would be doing or how the press operation would be organized?

COLEMAN: Right after we came back from the nomination, Pierre asked me to handle some of Mrs. Kennedy's things because she wasn't going to campaign—she was going to stay in Hyannis. So I had an immediate assignment, and that lasted for a few weeks, dealing with women page reporters and just handling interviews for her. And we had to set up some of these teas in Washington for Washington reporters, and then others were invited from out of town, and I really didn't know what women reporters could be like. The first tea we were going to have, we were going to invite women reporters from a certain part of the country, and the women in the press corps in Washington got wind of that and just started howling to beat the band about that. "You can't have it. You mean you're not going to have the Washington women reporters in first." So of course we had to scrap all that and have the Washington reporters in first. They are really a tough crew, especially the Washington ones,

when they want to be. And then some woman from a Detroit paper wanted to interview her, and I arranged that and went up to New York. And we did it in New York in the Carlyle. I met with Mrs. Kennedy for dinner one night there, and she could tell me what she wanted and what she thought she'd have to do and who she could see. And then there was an article for a Sunday supplement magazine thing which I would ghost write and then she would....She gave me what she wanted to say, and then I'd write something, and then she'd okay it. And we did things like that. She'd call me from Hyannis from time to time, and I went up to New York a couple of times. We did that for a few weeks, and then I went off that, and Pierre went off on the road with Chris and Sue [Sue M. Vogelsinger], and Andy, I guess. I was

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supposed to stay behind. There was always a problem about where I was going to be located so I was constantly moving around town. I don't know how anybody ever found me anyway. Every time I got some place, they'd decide that they had.... I was at the Democratic National Committee in one room, and then they decided that the Johnson people were unhappy because they didn't have enough space. So they moved me out of one place because they were going to put the Johnson people in there. Then they brought in a bunch of women to do something or other, and I got moved again, so I used to just find a space. What I was supposed to do was to be kind of a clearinghouse for reporters who wanted to pick up the campaign at some point or another, and they needed to find out where the campaign was going to be at a given time. Then they were to give me their travel arrangements, and I would coordinate with the campaign, wherever it was, and try to get them hotel accommodations and let them know that the guy was coming and all that sort of thing. This was different than providing the general information I always provided for people who called up and said, you know, "How many children does the whole Kennedy clan have?" or something. So it was kind of crazy that I never had a space, but we never had a regular office. After he got nominated, he went up to the Senate office for the special session, and then after that most of the press office was on the road, so we really never had permanent quarters anywhere.

STEWART: Well, Roger Tubby [Roger W. Tubby]?...

COLEMAN: He was handling general press stuff.

STEWART: Were you working with or for him at all? You had nothing to do with...

COLEMAN: No, I was completely independent of that operation. That was the regular sort of Democratic National Committee information structure, and I was still working essentially for Pierre. I was not a part of that.

STEWART: So you were really a little independent operation of your own, as far as Washington was concerned?

COLEMAN: Yeah. And then they called me to come up to New York. Oh, I don't know: how many debates were there? I don't even remember now. But it was for a debate in New York, one of the debates, the third maybe. And I thought I was just coming up for the weekend to spend time with them there. And then Pierre said to me when I was there, "Do you want to go the rest of the way?" And I said yeah, with my two dresses, or whatever I had. I promptly lost a pair of shoes. But I stayed on until the end, which was great. I mean it was really very interesting for me because it was...

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I had the strangest feeling afterwards when he won by a small margin because I was on the end of the campaign when the crowds were huge, and, it just seemed like then was the first time I really had a feeling, "He certainly is going to win," you know, "and he's going to win big." But I know now you can't judge by the crowds.

STEWART: Well, the crowds in the areas he was in you couldn't.

COLEMAN: They were all so very intent, you know. They were always.... I like to wander through the crowds, or be on the periphery of the crowds so I can watch the people as they listen to him.

STEWART: Were there any problems that you didn't mention in connection with Mrs. Kennedy at the beginning of the campaign: problems, for example, as to what type of exposure she would have?

COLEMAN: Oh, yeah. I think she's a lovely woman. I really liked her. She was always very gracious in her dealings with me and everything, but it was clear what she wanted to do in terms of the press, and what maybe I thought she should be doing weren't the same thing. But I don't know. I think I understood what she wanted and what she thought she ought to do, and I thought she could get away with it to some degree.

STEWART: Which was?

COLEMAN: You know, to limit herself considerably. The thing was that she seemed so naive in a lot of ways about it. She didn't seem to me to be hostile really to women reporters or anything. She wanted to come across as being.... She had a kind of image of herself, or maybe what she thought a politician's wife ought to be, and maybe she thought she wasn't doing it because she wasn't going to be campaigning. But she'd want to impress the women reporters with her interest in her husband's campaign. She'd come across sometimes with this sort of breathless air about her that made her seem insincere sometimes, I thought. And that used to bother me because I knew she meant it. She was just trying to convince the reporter that she meant it, and it sort of never came right. I never felt I could say to her....I didn't know her well at all, and certainly I wasn't going to be assigned to her in any way. There was no question that I was ever going to be assigned to working with her permanently. And I felt

hesitant about saying, “Well look, Mrs. Kennedy, why don't you just straightforward say what you mean?” But I've seen her, you know, in talking casually with her friends or

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acquaintances; she was a different person when she spoke with a reporter. I thought that was unfortunate because I thought some of the women were in awe of her, as much as the women...

STEWART: The women reporters?

COLEMAN: Oh, yeah. The Washington press corps types. As I said, they're kind of tough, and they've been around, and they know their job to some degree, and they fight tooth and nail to get to see her or something or other. And then they got into—I'll never forget that first tea. They'd given me such a hard time about it that, as a matter of fact, I was getting help from a couple of pros, women who.... Gladys Yoel, who had worked at the Democratic National Committee, with Natalie Spingarn, who'd done this kind of thing before, had to come in and sort of help bail me out of the whole thing because I was about to get into fights, I think, with the women reporters about what they could or couldn't do. I was going to tell them, you know, just plain and simple: “This is what we're doing.” And these other women knew better about it. At any rate, when they got in to the tea with Mrs. Kennedy at her house in Georgetown—she'd come back into town to do it—they were all just as gentle as lambs with her, very careful about what they asked her. They fell all over themselves to be.... And I don't think it was a really tough session at all, and I think she handled it very well, as a matter of fact.

STEWART: Is this their usual way of dealing with people like that, or did they think that there's a good chance she's going to be First Lady sometime so we've got to be very good to her?

COLEMAN: Well, her manner is such that you can't exactly be terrifically hostile or aggressive with somebody who's very gentle and soft-spoken with you. It's almost as if—this is perhaps being unfair to the women reporters—she was so much of a lady, you know, that it put them in kind of a deferential position. She had dignity, and she had class. And I think that they weren't dealing with, perhaps, that which they were used to dealing with. I think she was just different from them; she was quite different from them. That didn't mean that they wouldn't talk outside of the room and say something, you know. Perhaps they didn't think they got the answers they wanted. I wish we had a transcript of that first tea or some of those press conference teas. I'm trying to remember the questions they asked.

STEWART: Was she ever lacking for knowledge or really embarrassed by not knowing something she should have known about the

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campaign or about the political situation in general?

COLEMAN: She wasn't asked political type questions most of the time so she didn't have to respond. I think she knew enough of what was going on. She never got into policy questions either, for that matter. They'd ask her how she would feel as the First Lady, what kinds of things would she like to do, how was she concerned about her husband in the campaign, and what kind of a life did she want. She had a pattern; she had a formulaic response for this which worked pretty well. I think it reflected what she thought: she wanted to create a good family situation for him. She wanted him to be able to spend time with his children and as much allow himself a private life as possible. And she wanted to create that private life, and she wanted to keep it separate from his public life. And she made herself pretty clear, I think about that separation of his private and public life. Then they'd ask her about her own interests: reading and her knowledge of languages and the kinds of things that she was well adapted—she could handle quite well talking about herself and her own...

STEWART: Did you have these affairs with people outside of Washington?

COLEMAN: Yeah. That was the only one I really handled in those two or three weeks I worked for her. And then I went on to do something else. I don't remember whether it was Natalie Spingarn or Gladys Yoel or both, who kind of handled her press from there on in. They didn't have as many conferences as they were going to originally. It was going to be from every section of the country sort of. And I think they went with one or two more and then dropped it. But they did have more, than that one.

STEWART: You say you were handling reporters who were joining the campaign. A lot, of course, has been made of the fact that reporters were so anxious to get off the Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] campaign and back on the Kennedy thing when they did switch, the two or three weeks at each. Did you find this to be true...

COLEMAN: Yeah, they always said things like that. Yeah, they did say that quite a good deal. I knew a fair number of them anyway from before, from all that time, and you just got to know them by talking to them on the phone or something. One would call up and say, "I'm glad I'm going back on the Kennedy thing now. Thank God, I'm going back on the Kennedy thing." And then when I was traveling on the campaign, a lot of them mentioned that—it was much more fun and this sort of thing. They drove me wild sometimes. We had about three buses generally, press buses. The first bus would have all the national reporters on it. Guys like

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Bill Lawrence [William H. Lawrence] would get up in the front of the bus driver—poor bus drivers, there must be some of them still in mental institutions after that. He would be expected to follow this motorcade, you know, and the reporters would just be practically taking the whole wheel out of his hands if he didn't stay right on top of that thing. They used to scream and holler and carry on. And I was sort of carrying—you know what you do on a campaign— carrying press releases around and seeing if they needed anything. Like one time—they used to miss

lunch a lot of times because they'd have to go file stories or something, so one time I got out and went into some delicatessen and got them sandwiches, you know, and bring sandwiches back on the bus. We stopped in one shopping center, and I got cookies, I guess, doughnuts or something like that. But most of the work, if we did any work, would be at a hotel we'd stop at that night like typing things and getting stuff around.

STEWART: So you spent about two weeks...

COLEMAN: During the day it was just traveling. They were driving me crazy, so I got to go on the second bus so that I wasn't traveling with the national press. And Lyn Nofziger [Franklin C. Nofziger]? and I—I always think of that now that Lyn is press secretary to Reagan [Ronald Reagan]—Lyn Nofziger was one of the few, if not the only, Republican among those newspaper guys. And he couldn't stand it because that's all he'd hear them talk about was how great Kennedy was and everything. And he thought they were definitely biased. So he'd start moving back. I think we wound up on the third bus finally all by ourselves, telling funny stories. Jim Deakin [James Deakin] was another one who used to be funny. I always enjoyed that.

STEWART: So you spent about two weeks actually...

COLEMAN: I think it was two and a half weeks. Sometime around the third week in October or something like that.

STEWART: So you were on the final swing up through New England and then you were down in Hyannis for the election?

COLEMAN: We came back to Washington, I know, briefly in that week before because I remember I got my chance to vote absentee. I just mailed my ballot in at the last minute so I knew we stopped in Washington for something overnight one time. But we did go to Hyannis and, you know....

STEWART: And you remained for all the rallies the night before and the Boston Garden and all that.

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COLEMAN: Oh yeah. Oh, the Boston Garden was the most frightening thing I'd ever seen. I thought I was getting used to those halls—I used to not go into the halls sometimes because it would be terribly hard to get out again when he came out. And if you had to be in a motorcade....I almost got left behind in Oklahoma City, and that was.... And in Brooklyn one time, the crowds broke through the lines, and we really had some time getting back to the buses. A couple of guys had to lead me back to the bus. I remember some bows off my dress got torn off, and so I got a little bit nervous about crowds. And that Boston thing, people were jumping over tables, as I remember: there were some tables. It was really wild that night.

STEWART: What do you remember about election day in Hyannis, or what were you doing? Were you at the armory?

COLEMAN: Yes, we were at the armory the whole time. We had a couple of wire service machines in there and television sets. Pierre was only there for a while, then he was out at the house. Then he came back. I remember being up very late and not knowing that he hadn't....I guess Pierre had come back over and said that Kennedy wasn't coming over until he'd heard or something like that. So we just went to bed, I guess, finally, at two or three or something like that, then got up early and came back over and heard that he was going to come over and he had won. But it was sort of a funny letdown feeling that night, especially when it got later, not early. But early, early it looked good, didn't it? And then suddenly it started changing, and everybody had grown quiet. And then it kind of dragged on, sort of indefinitely.

STEWART: Was it a definite emotional letdown after the campaign, or that...

COLEMAN: That night. I didn't really feel very much the next day. I thought about that when he came over; although, when he came over and made his little speech, I know a lot of people who worked for him felt sort of emotional about that. That felt like something was happening then, but then it was kind of....But the night before and after that, I should say, it was kind of a letdown feeling, a quiet feeling. We never did have any kind of party or anything like that. We went back almost immediately that next day. I remember I was on the plane with somebody who was worrying about whether he had a job. Chuck Henderson [Charlie Henderson]. He didn't as a matter of fact.

STEWART: Was there any speculation concerning.... Pardon?

COLEMAN: There was a guy named Chuck Henderson, and he didn't as a matter of fact. He had gone with Sue to set up the whole

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Hyannis situation. He was from California. Oh, maybe he wasn't from California originally, but I know afterwards he went to work for a California company so I'm just assuming he was a Californian. But I don't know what part he played during the campaign. I mean there were so many people in and out and everything. But I remember him saying something the next day about how, next thing you know you don't have a job, and nobody seems to worry about you and things like that.

STEWART: Was there speculation during the campaign as to what you would all do if he did win and go to the White House? Was it always assumed that you'd just follow along and go with Pierre to the White House?

COLEMAN: I suppose so. I don't remember. I remember thinking just a couple of times, you know, and that I wanted to because I still thought I wanted to back to a newspaper or something. But I don't know. Campaigns, I think, are funny this way because you know you've got a certain period of time to be on something so it's easy not to think about tomorrow until tomorrow comes. It's not going to last forever. Some reporter once said that about campaigns: it's like purgatory every four years or something. It's going to end, though; you can get out of it.

STEWART: What did you do during the whole transition period?

COLEMAN: Well, we went to Palm Beach once, I remember. We were always finding some other place to be. We needed an office before the Inauguration. And we got some space over on L Street somewhere. There were a lot of special task forces being appointed by the president-elect and people he was naming to jobs. Oh, there was that whole thing on the doorstep of his Georgetown house when he was naming people. So we were involved in press releases on new appointees and task forces and all that kind of thing. At Palm Beach—I guess we made a couple of trips to Palm Beach—oh, yes, the baby was born on one of those trips. Yes, there were a number of trips, as a matter of fact. I guess I only went on a couple. There were always people coming down. Billy Graham [William F. Graham] came down. I don't know why I remember that one so much except the president was golfing that day or something. So, who was coming and what they were talking to him about and who he had appointed and that kind of thing. Pierre would hold a briefing, if we were in Palm Beach. The same sort of thing. It never changed very much, no matter whether he was a candidate, a primary candidate, regular candidate; we always had the same things to do.

STEWART: That's interesting, in a way, that with so many other people in the organization, their functions shifted quite radically in these different periods. But with you people it just went on...

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COLEMAN: Oh, yeah. It was always the same. The only thing that ever differed about our operation was whether we had different people in it, and so we did from time to time. And then there was always prestige attached to those who were there first, you know, which one of us was there first. The usual frictions about maybe resenting people who'd come on later than you had or that sort of stuff. I think my biggest problem probably was that I didn't travel more in the campaigns, and perhaps I felt I should have. But that's something years later you don't really care about that much anymore. I think it bothered me then. In the primaries the thing it is true that they kind of had to rely on people to be where they were supposed to be when they needed them, and that I probably ruined my chances after I got sick in Wisconsin. In the campaign in general, in any situation like that, in both the primary campaign and in the general elections, there were always little internal rivalries going on, even among the girls, or more so among the girls. They seemed important then, but they weren't ever. It was the same kind of thing that might have gone on among the men or who was going to get what job when. I don't think someone like Pierre could ever remove himself from thinking about

what he was going to do, you know. Would he be the press secretary? And I think he may have had some doubts at some points about that.

STEWART: I was going to ask you. Were there legitimate or definite questions that he might not be the press secretary?

COLEMAN: I've forgotten; one time, he suggested to me that he didn't think he would be. He wasn't sure he might be. But I don't remember when he said that to me, whether it was in retrospect afterwards or not. Well, other people came on who knew the Kennedys a little bit better or maybe Pierre thought was more their type, like Wilson. I wondered what position Wilson was finally going to have. I think during the campaign you'd think about things like that from time to time, who would be where. I always thought about it just in terms of people who were most directly around me, like Pierre. A guy like Larry O'Brien had set function. There really weren't many people who could compete with Larry O'Brien on what he was doing. There were a lot of people who could compete with Pierre because he had to have people working with him. He had to have assistants, and then he did. He had several different people, only one of whom wound up in the White House, interestingly enough. Which was Andy.

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STEWART: What do you mean: of the men?

COLEMAN: Of the guys who worked with him. And Andy's the man whom he knew and trusted for a long time.

STEWART: What do you mean, during the campaign?

COLEMAN: Yeah, yeah. Andy's the person he had known for many years and could work with comfortably.

STEWART: You mentioned a couple of times—you used the terms the “guys” and the “fellows.” A lot of people have commented on how the president and the people around him looked on the role of females in politics and in work in general. Now, for example, a lot has been made of the fact that they very seldom had any real regard for women politicians or women who were very knowledgeable politically. Did you always feel this distinction between what was a man's job and what was a woman's job?

COLEMAN: Oh, yeah. I don't think there's any question about that. You just assume that, actually, because you never saw a woman in a high position in the whole campaign structure. Of the women politicians they dealt with, I tend to have the same opinion of them, so I suppose I just assumed it naturally from them. There was really no room for women in the hierarchy: I don't know that they ever gave any consideration to any. And there weren't any women around in the different jobs I knew about who ever strove really to get any higher. We were all sort of a class of secretaries, whether we ever did.... You know, in

press offices for instance, you don't necessarily do secretarial work, but, so what, you're still in that role. But there was no possibility of thinking you were going to move around in the structure in any way. There weren't that many women politicians. I think Mildred Jeffrey perhaps stood fairly high in their estimation, and still does, to the Kennedys. I can't remember any other women politicians that I dealt with.

STEWART: Even among the female staff was there always a good separation, for example, between people who were just typing and just doing the most menial things and other people?

COLEMAN: I think political jobs attract certain kinds of women anyway so there may be more aggressive women in the secretarial jobs than in ordinary secretarial jobs in offices. And they're women who like something different and want to travel. There's always a certain amount of authority you can have within any setup because you're not doing straight secretarial work in an office. So, if you've got capable women, they can do a lot of things. For

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somebody like Pierre, who's not good on detail for instance, women are very important to a good operation for him. Pierre is the kind of man you can love working for, but you can get very frustrated with him because he doesn't take care of a lot of things like that, or didn't. And he had competent women behind him. I'm not talking about myself necessarily, but Chris, Lenore. Lenore had worked in California politics before, and she knew about politics, and she knew about the kinds of things she had to do. Chris had competent jobs at the State Department, and was used to taking command of things. Sue had worked in Senator Kennedy's office and knew her way around the whole structure. And they were quite able to deal with all kinds of changing situations, and one thing you get in the press office, even more than in the others, is a lot of flexibility and a lot of moving around. It also means they're just as ambitious in their own right as the men are in their fields. I don't think people realize that to some degree because everybody is occupied with the men at the top, as rightly they should be, but there's a heck of a lot that goes on in the basement, too, because everybody's concerned about where they're going to be and who they're going to be working for. And there were those casualties, too. Not everybody went through that whole campaign, where they started out, at any rate.

STEWART: Well, look it, before we move into the White House, do you want to continue now, or do you want to....

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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