Kirk LeMoyne Billings Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 06/19/64
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note
Billings was a Kennedy family friend and associate. In this interview, he discusses John F. Kennedy's [JFK] familial relationships, his time at the Choate School, and some of his close friendships, among other issues.

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Kirk LeMoyne Billings – JFK #2

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Oral History Interview

with

K. LEMOYNE BILLINGS

June 19, 1964
New York City

By Walter D. Sohier

For the John F. Kennedy Library

SOHIER: Lem, I wonder if we could perhaps go back to some of the things discussed in your first interview. One of them was [John Fitzgerald] Jack Kennedy's brother [Joseph P. Jr.] Joe Kennedy and really what was their relationship. A lot has been said about this and written about it; maybe you'd like to talk about that.

BILLINGS: I'd really like to talk about it, because this is something that has been discussed thoroughly in almost all the books written about Jack. I have certain feelings about it myself which aren't really covered in anything I've read. Joe was two years older than Jack and they had a perfectly normal and happy brother relationship. Both were good athletes. Joe was a better athlete because he was considerably heavier and two years older.

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Two years in age made a lot of difference and Jack was fairly light. It has been said in many books that Jack was always secondary to Joe. At least, this is the way I have interpreted a lot of the things said. For instance, if Joe had not died, Jack's whole career would have drastically changed; that Jack would not have been the great man that he was destined to be. During their years at Choate, they didn't see an awful lot of each other. They were on different teams, they were in different classes, they had entirely different friends, they lived in different dormitories,

and Choate was a very big school. Even in those days, there were 530 boys. We really have to talk about their relationship when they were at home.

SOHIER: I've read, in one book in particular, of family scenes of violent competition between them in sports

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at the [Cape Cod] Cape or down in Florida, including wrestling and who was stronger and that sort of thing. Is that a fact? I had an older brother and I wasn't that competitive with him in sports. Were they that competitive?

BILLINGS: What I'm talking about is the period in Jack's life from fifteen on. Possibly they did fight before that time, both physically and orally and were highly competitive. I don't know anything about those early years. What I do know is the period I spent with them during vacations after Jack's fifteenth birthday. Just to repeat for a second; Jack was physically quite different from Joe. I really don't think there could be any consideration of a physical competition between them. A wrestling match between Jack and Joe would have been out of the question because, as I said, Joe was older and

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considerably stronger so this would have been kind of a ridiculous match. Let's include boxing in on that too. If they were playing on separate sides on the touch football field or in baseball, there was normal boy competition. I don't think Jack or Joe were more anxious to beat each other than they were to beat other boys who were playing the game. In fact, I would say there was a lot more competition when playing against outsiders. I never played tennis, so I can't really speak about this sport as I'd like to, but I've watched them and would say that they did compete fiercely in that sport and in golf as well. But, again, I would say the competition wouldn't have been as great as with someone outside the family.

SOHIER: Was Joe, in any sense, the apple of his father's eye, the favorite one? Did [Joseph P.

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Kennedy] Mr. Kennedy have favorites in the family? You get the feeling that Joe was sort of the heir-apparent and, after his death, Jack Kennedy was able to step up and be the heir-apparent. Is there anything to that?

BILLINGS: I wish Jack could answer that. I must say that during the time I spent with Jack he never discussed it. If Mr. Kennedy had a favorite in his older son, he certainly was very careful never to show it. I was never conscious of it. If Jack, being the second son, thought so, he certainly never discussed it. I think there is no question, thinking back to those early years, that the older children were Mr. Kennedy's

favorites, meaning, of course, Jack, Joe and [Kathleen Kennedy] Kathleen. That's accounted for by the fact that they were obviously more mature and were more enjoyable to be

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with. He wasn't able to enjoy the other children in the same way until later.

SOHIER: In your last interview you talked quite a lot about the dinner table conversation and how very interesting it was. I guess then the principal participants were the older children. Was Joe a particularly bright guy? Was he more alert…. I realize he was two years older, but was he more alert than Jack Kennedy? Was there competition in that arena? What was Mr. Kennedy's role in this? Was he trying to get both of them to think about things? What was the relationship there?

BILLINGS: Joe, of course, just as you said, was older and was very bright. There's no question about that. Probably, Joe even seemed brighter to all of us then, compared to other boys, maybe, it was because all during

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those years, up until the time he went away to war, he had the advantage of two more years education then, let's say, Jack or any of Jack's friends. To us he did seem bright and articulate. He was always interested in what was going on in the world, read widely, had a lot in common with Mr. Kennedy. But, I must say, I don't recall Jack ever, from the very beginning, being quiet during those meal time conversations. I think that, and I may be just trying to remember this without being sure, there were a great many arguments on points where Joe or Jack didn't agree. As for Mr. Kennedy's role, he always encouraged them to think for themselves…. The conversations all seemed very mature. There was never a teacher-student relationship. It was a give and take discussion of current affairs.

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SOHIER: While we're on the subject of these meals, what was Mr. Kennedy's purpose in these discussions? Was he trying to influence the thinking of his sons, or was he merely trying to sharpen their minds so they had a keen interest in current affairs? What was the purpose of this?

BILLINGS: Well, of course, as you probably know, he wouldn't be Mr. Kennedy if you really knew what his real purpose was in anything he ever did. But I do not feel that Mr. Kennedy ever, in any way, tried to influence the thinking of the boys or tried to teach them any particular philosophies of his own. I think his main purpose was to encourage them to think and to defend their own points of view. Mr. Kennedy often took the opposite point of view just to stimulate them, but I don't think that he ever right up to the time of his sickness, tried to dominate or

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direct the thinking of his children.

SOHIER: Did Mr. Kennedy ever say something like this, "Joe, you're the one who is going to go into politics; now, Jack, you'll probably be a lawyer or a newspaper man." He didn't sort of decide what their futures were going to be?

BILLINGS: No, no, again, if he did, I'd be very surprised because I think I was around Mr. Kennedy enough to know that he wasn't trying to direct his childrens' lives. I do think, however, that he was very anxious to encourage his boys to go into public service and not to enter into business. I think he did exert influence in this direction. He was absolutely determined that they would not follow his footsteps as businessmen. Possibly behind this, was the fact that Mr. Kennedy him-

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self was such a fantastic success in business that he felt this career offered no challenge for his children. He had, in the later years of his life, of course, gone into government service. I think that he felt the boys already had enough money, and that boys with their kind of education and background, could and should make a contribution to their country. I think that he really did exert his influence to have them do this. But, as to whether they went into the government through elective or appointive office, he didn't care. I think he just wanted them to go into public service.

SOHIER: One hears the statement — I've heard it from at least one member of Jack Kennedy's family — that Mr. Kennedy really made the boys. In fact, to expand on that, Mrs. Kennedy sort of brought up the

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family because Mr. Kennedy was away a lot, but that Mr. Kennedy really made the boys what they are today. I don't quite know what that means. Maybe you could expand on that.

BILLINGS: I think that there is a basis for that statement, but it is perhaps too strong. I think he did exert a tremendous amount of influence on them. He unquestionably wanted them to turn out to be the right kind of citizens. I think I really covered a lot of this in the first interview, the way I feel about Mr. Kennedy as a father. To sum up — I'd say that he did everything in his power, and did it awfully well, to try to influence them to make a contribution with their lives.

SOHIER: What was the effect on Jack Kenendy of his brother Joe's death? I guess you weren't around at

that time…. You were in the Pacific. This was in August of 1944 when Joe's death was announced. Did you have discussions with Jack Kennedy afterward about this? What was the impact there?

BILLINGS: As you say, I was out of the country. For almost two more years I did correspond a lot with Jack. Possibly there's something about it in letters I received from him. I still have all his letters. I do know that Jack was not certain of what he was going to do with his future. I think Joe was more certain than he was. Joe had law school behind him. He had pretty well decided that he was going into politics. He had already been a delegate to the Democratic Convention. On the other hand, Jack had fully intended to go to law school had not the war interfered. He was uncertain as

to whether he would go to law school after the war. He knew he wanted to write and he knew he wrote well. To be able to express oneself orally as well as in writing is, of course, very helpful in politics. He was a good student. I think he already knew that he was intelligent and that he had the ability and desire to continue to grow intellectually. He liked to study…. Teaching may have crossed his mind. He also may have given some consideration to a journalistic career. However, his major studies at Harvard were in government. With his background this would logically lead into politics. I don't really think that Jack knew himself whether he was going into politics or not. However, knowing his abilities, interests and background, I firmly believe, that he would have entered politics even had he had three

elder brothers like Joe.

SOHIER: So that if Joe had lived you still feel that Jack Kennedy would have gotten into politics?

BILLINGS: There is absolutely no question in my mind whatsoever. None.

SOHIER: Nobody was holding him back saying "This is Joe's area; you find something else?"

BILLINGS: No, because it never reached that. Remember, how old was Jack when Joe died. Jack was still in the Navy; he hadn't attended law school, as he had planned. His father would have never discouraged him from going into politics no matter what Joe did. Joe's career may have closed Massachusetts to him temporarily — but he really was a New Yorker anyway. At the time of Joe's death he hadn't thought through his future. I

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can't remember how old he was…

SOHIER: He was twenty-seven; it was 1944. He was born in 1917.

BILLINGS: He had lost four years. During those war years, one wasn't thinking too much about the future, so I'm absolutely convinced that his type of personality, his type of mind, everything Jack Kennedy had, would lean toward a political career; just as his brother Teddy did, no matter how many brothers he had in politics.

SOHIER: What is interesting to know in connection with the writing of the book *As We Remember Joe*? Do you have any comment on that?

BILLINGS: Jack put that together after I had been separated from the Navy. I remember him gathering material for the book and interviewing Joe's friends and

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associates, asking them to write about him. I'd like to go back to the brothers' relationship. When two brothers growing up and they are two years apart you aren't aware of a great love between them, but Jack's editing of Joe's memorial book was a real work of love. There's no question about it, Jack had a fantastically strong admiration for his older brother and what his older brother had accomplished in the very short time he lived.

SOHIER: I wonder, maybe we could flip back to the Choate school period a little bit. I read in a book yesterday a statement that he was widely respected by his classmates and that in his final year he was voted most likely to succeed and, yet, in looking over your first interview that doesn't seem to quite square with what you said. I wonder, maybe, if you could comment further on

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his relationship with his classmates.

BILLINGS: First of all, I think Jack was largely elected most likely to succeed because the financial success of his father was well known at the school. I don't know whether I can say much on this subject than I said in the first interview because, actually, I wouldn't say that Jack was widely respected by his contemporaries at Choate. I know he never gave this any thought. He really had no desire, at that time, to be respected or even to be popular. He was just completely and absolutely a normal boy who had not matured any further than he should have matured at that age. He was interested in having a

lot of fun, he was interested in the studies that he liked, and he was bored to death with the studies he didn't. He was interested, very interested in girls, he was

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interested in athletics. He certainly had a sense of humor. He would make fun of people if he felt like it, and I think for this reason a lot of boys didn't like him. He certainly wasn't at Choate the kind of boy whom you would say was one of the leaders of the school.

SOHIER: You saw him a lot during vacations in the last two years at Choate, I believe. You mentioned girls. Did he take out a lot of different girls, or did he have one particular one? Could you talk about that a little bit?

BILLINGS: Whenever he was hime there was always a girl around — usually it was a different girl each time. Almost, without exception, every girl he showed any interest in became very fond of him. I think the reason for this was that he was not only attractive but also he had tremendous interest in girls. They really liked him and he was

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very, very successful. This was important to him because he wanted to be successful in this area. He really enjoyed girls.

SOHIER: What did he look for? Were they good athletes?

BILLINGS: They were usually very feminine and beautiful girls, who he would date at night. He was not, in the least, interested in their athletic abilities as he was primarily interested in dating them at night and didn't want them particularly as friends or pals. Actually, during the Choate years there was one girl in whom he was more interested than in others. He did, however, take out other girls at the same time. During the Choate and Harvard years, he saw a lot of Olive Cawley. Actually Olive was a friend until he died. She married [Thomas

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J. Jr.] Tom Watson who was such a help to him as the only leading businessman who supported him in the White House.

SOHIER: Do you think he ever was planing on getting engaged or marrying her at any point? Did it ever reach that sort of stage?

BILLINGS: Until he married [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] Jackie Bouvier he never really gave any serious consideration to marrying any particular girl. I think, maybe, marriage might have crossed his mind but I don't think he

had ever really found any girl whom he wanted to marry. As I said, he never had any one girl for any very long period except Olive. Of course, he was still quite young when she married Tom. I don't think he was ever really in love with her anyway.

SOHIER: Jack Kennedy married rather late in

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life. Was there a consideration that he was sort of getting his career going and that had to take all his energies? Was there sort of a practical reason such as that?

BILLINGS: That certainly entered into it. There is no question about it, any girl would have married Jack Kennedy had he asked her. First there were the war years, after the war years he went right into politics. Except for a few years as a congressman he was never really settled in Washington. From 1950 one, he was constantly on the road with ambitions for a job higher that the one he held. He was never in Washington on weekends. This very active life was one of the reasons — and probably the most important one. Unlike most men of that age — he did not need the home life marriage gives. More than

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that, he just hadn't found a girl with whom he really wanted to settle down. He undoubtedly realized, being a Catholic in politics, that he couldn't afford to make a mistake in marriage. He knew he needed more than a pretty face, he needed an intelligent girl who could intelligently stimulate him. Of course, also, it wasn't until he had presidential ambitions that he felt that marriage was a necessity. Jackie, to my knowledge, was the first girl he ever wanted to marry. I'm positive she is the only girl he ever asked.

SOHIER: Was it pretty clear that it was trouble if he tried to marry a non-Catholic? Did Mr. Kennedy ever say anything like that or was that just like in any normal Catholic family something that everybody hoped would happen? Do you remember any discussion on this?

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BILLINGS: The problem never really came up because, as I said, he never got seriously involved as far as marriage plans were concerned. This never came up. Actually, two of the Kennedy girls married Protestants. [Kathleen Kennedy Hartington] Kathleen married a very strong Protestant, because [William John Robert Cavendish — Marquess of Hartington] Billy Hartigan was heir to the Duke of Devonshire, he couldn't change his religion or bring up his children as Catholics, therefore, Kathleen was married outside the church. This naturally caused Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy great pain but after Kick made her decision, her father supported her. On the other hand, I don't believe Mrs. Kennedy ever really forgave her — and felt when she was

killed so young in an airplane — that this was God's will. [Patricia Kenendy Lawford] Pat also married

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a Protestant, but unlike Kathleen, she married in the Catholic Church. Mrs. Kennedy obviously became more liberal, because she seems to have forgiven Pat even after she was divorced.

SOHIER: Sometimes people graduating from a prep school like Choate build up a lot of loyalty to the school and go back for reunions. Was Jack Kennedy a big reunion type? Did he ever go back?

BILLINGS: I think I might say here Jack Kennedy didn't like Choate when he graduated and neither did I.

SOHIER: Is that why [Robert F. Kennedy] Bob went to Milton, for example?

BILLINGS: Yes, it is. I think that I covered this in the first interview. Jack was not popular with the faculty at all and the reasons were that Jack wasn't

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interested in following all the little regulations that are necessary in a boys' school. At the time these rules seemed unimportant and Jack felt no need to conform. He was full of life and vigor. He was not interested in keeping his room neat and he didn't care if he were on time for classes or being neatly dressed. He might have been slightly wise with some of the teachers so he wasn't really popular with the faculty at all. We had some problems at school along these very small simple lines. Actually, neither of us ever did anything seriously wrong there. Neither of us smoked (as a matter of fact Jack never smoked until I was in my thirties). We didn't drink and we didn't go downtown after lights like some boys did but we did find ourselves in trouble because

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we did these silly little things.

SOHIER: Can you remember these wise kinds of things that you did? Did you talk in the back of a class, play tricks on teachers? Do you remember any particular things?

BILLINGS: Well, I mentioned one in the first interview — something he did about his trunk.

SOHIER: Yes. You mentioned also about the golf course…. how a Master….

BILLINGS: That was sort of typical of his attitude. He certainly was never mean; he was always extremely good fun. But what I'm really saying is that the Headmaster at that time was George St. John. As I think about him, he lacked the proper qualities to head up a boys' school. Although, he had the ability to raise

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money and to favorably impress parents, he had absolutely no understanding of young boys in their most important, developing years. He took a very serious and dim view of the way both Jack and I behaved. He even asked Mr. Kennedy up. Mr. Kennedy, wise as he was, saw that the Headmaster was making too much of little things. Although he wasn't at all pleased with Jack's immature behavior he never had any interest in the school again after Jack graduated.

SOHIER: Mr. Kennedy paid a visit to look the thing over?

BILLINGS: He was asked to by the Headmaster, as was [Mrs. Frederic Tremaine Billings] my mother. Well, I might as well go into the real reasons for that. We had a room that was very close to the dining hall. Between

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dinner and chapel there was a period of about twenty minutes during which time there was very little to do. We happened to have a pretty good Victrola and we found that everytime we came to our room we couldn't get into it ourselves. The Headmaster had constantly mentioned in chapel that the worst kind of boy he knew was what he referred to as a "mucker." He said that about 5 per cent of the boys in his school were "mucker" and that if he knew who they were he would expel them. Well, here is an example of a foolish but a normal boyish attitude — immediately we formed a club called the Mucker's Club. Only members of the Mucker's Club were allowed in our room during the after dinner period. When the Headmaster heard this, the choice of the club name irritated him. Not being an understanding man he expelled all the muckers. There were thirteen of

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us. Actually, all thirteen were rather outstanding boys in the school — all sixth formers. None of us had ever caused any serious trouble. Some of the Masters, who were more emotionally stable than Mr. St. John, reasoned with him to reconsider. Nevertheless Mr. St. John did ask Mr. Kenendy to come up to Choate to discuss Jack's behaviour. Although the whole episode showed that Jack Kenedy hadn't matured, it might have showed some misdirected qualities of leadership in that we found the Club — and the Headmaster had labelled Jack and myself — Public Enemies #1 and #2 of the school in that order.

END OF TAPE 1 of 3 — INTERVIEW TWO

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SOHIER: To wrap up the discussion of Choate School, I wonder whether you might have any more stories of, let's say, pranks or whatever in which Jack was involved?

BILLINGS: I think I can remember a few which I think were fun. I've talked before about some of the happy memories I have of Jack at Choate. I always felt, after Jack reached the presidency, that people might possibly misinterpret some of these stories. For instance, I remember that very bad day when our Headmaster discovered that we had named our club the "Muckers Club." We were all in class at the time. I can't recall who told him about us. He ordered that we be brought to his office immediately. Of course, it was very easy to find those

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of us who were in class; there were thirteen of us, and we were all brought in, with the exception of Jack Kennedy. He was absent from his class, so it wasn't until a few minutes later that he was found. He had been down in the infirmary. Whenever we did not feel like going to class, we would go down to the infirmary with a sore throat. They would spray your throat and give you a tardy slip, on which they had crossed out the word "absent" leaving the word "tardy." It was simple to switch this around, so that you were not tardy but instead, absent from that particular class. You would then put this slip on a spindle in the Headmaster's office. Jack was found on his way from the infirmary to the Headmaster's office to put the absent slip on the spindle. Of course, we were all assembled in that room. I don't know what he ever did with

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that slip, because he certainly didn't have the opportunity to put it on the Headmaster's spindle that day.

SOHIER: Did he ever tell his father a story like this? Would his father have thought it was funny?

BILLINGS: No, his father would have thought stories like that were not funny at all and he would have been very irritated. Mr. Kennedy would have considered that just plain stupid. He never considered anything stupid — amusing.

SOHIER: Was he scared of his father?

BILLINGS: He was when he did something wrong.

SOHIER: What would he have done? Did he have a sharp temper?

BILLINGS: A sharp tongue and a sharp eye. He did not want to be exposed to either one.

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SOHIER: Did you ever see that sharp eye turned on Jack Kenendy?

BILLINGS: I've seen it not only turned on Jack — but on myself as well. Before we move along I want to reiterate that we are telling these stories about Jack Kennedy because we want to show that he was a very normal prep school boy with all the typical foibles.

Each year there was a long weekend at Choate known as "Festivities." For this weekend, each boy was allowed to ask a girl up to Choate. The school set up a well organized schedule which, in most cases, was enjoyable. Part of the entertainment was a show of some kind put on by the Dramatic Club. While we were at Choate, the show was always a musical by Gilbert and Sullivan. It was compulsory for the entire school to see the performance three or ____

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times a year. Of course, one of these was at "Festivities." At this particular time, we had all seen the performance, and did not want to see it again. A former roommate at Choate was [Porter Dean Caesar] Pete Caesar. He was a year ahead of me. Pete had come up to "Festivities" as a graduate, from Princeton. He brought his car with him. It was just too much of a temptation for us to use it. Jack had Olive Cawley as a date and I, a girl from Pitssburgh named [Ruth Walker Brooks] Pussy Brooks. It was the first time we had ever done anything that was seriously wrong at Choate. This was a very scary experience for us because what we did was wrong. Remember, this was our senior year, just about a month before graduation. During the performance of Gilbert and Sullian, Pete Caesar drove us all to a roadhouse — where we may have ordered a

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beer — certainly nothing more because we didn't drink at that time.

SOHIER: Was beer within the rules Mr. Kennedy, about not drinking….

BILLINGS: Jack never accepted a thousand dollars for not drinking.

SOHIER: Oh, he didn't get his thousand dollars?

BILLINGS: No. We stayed away from Choate long enough for the end of the performance. We had hoped to return as everyone was going from the theatre to the dance in the Dining Hall. Everyone was in evening clothes. In fact, we were in "tails." We had hoped to slip into the dance without being seen. Unfortunately, we were in an open car. As we approached the school, we discovered that another car was following us, in fact, we found that

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this car was chasing us. These were the proctors whose duty was to check on the activities of the boys. We knew if they caught us we would be in the most serious kind of trouble. Fortunately, it was a pitch dark night. Pete Caesar drove at top speed out into the country with the authorities hot in pursuit. Jack and myself couldn't have been more frightened. Knowing our past experience with the Headmaster, we knew this would really be rough to finish our careers at Choate.

SOHIER: You'd have been thrown out?

BILLINGS: Without any question. In fact, the Headmaster expelled boys for much less. For instance, a boy caught smoking was expelled — no questions asked — out he went. Nevertheless, there were some very funny aspects of this evening. Remember, we were all in very

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formal evening clothes. The girls, of course, had very high heel shoes. We drove into a farmyard, turned off the car lights and Jack, Olive Cawley and I all ran into the barn. Pussy stayed in the car pretending that she was kissing Pete Caesar. Although the authorities checked them, there was nothing they could do, because they had no authority over a graduate student. Nevertheless, they apparently were sure that there had been undergraduates in the car, although they couldn't identify us. On the other hand, those of us hiding in the barnyard didn't know how many proctors there were. In the pitch dark we couldn't tell if some of them had left their car and were looking for us in the barnyard. Of course, we didn't dare to speak or try to locate each other. In complete silence, we just stayed hidden in the hay, in our "tails" and Olive

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in her high heel shoes and her long dress with farm animals all around us. The school car stayed there; Pete Caesar's car stayed tere. Finally, Pete Caesar drove off in the opposite direction from the school and away went the school car after him. At the barn we had no way of knowing whether that had left someone behind at the barn or not. You can imagine how harrowing this experience was. Finally, Pete Caesar came back and drove into the barnyard very fast; no other car was in sight. Olive rushed out to the car and lay on the floor at Pussy's feet with a coat thrown over her. I dashed to the back — Pete opened the trunk and I jumped in. He closed me in. We didn't dare call for Jack — so we left him behind.

SOHIER: You left him in the hay?

BILLINGS: Left him.

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SOHIER: How did he get back?

BILLINGS: It was only a mile to the school. Certainly that was better than screaming at him. We didn't know who was in the barnyard with us. At that moment the school car reappeared and the car chase began again. Finally, Pete Caesar drove to the center of town and at top speed going up and down alleys finally lost the pursuer. He delivered Olive and myself to the dance and we danced into the crowd together despite the fact that Olive had lost one heel from her shoe and looked pretty messy. About a half hour later, I'm glad to report, Jack showed up.

SOHIER: That's a wonderful story. Are there any other stories of that type during the Choate school period? Maybe during vacation or anything like this?

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BILLINGS: I don't know. I'm just trying to show a little bit about Jack and his sense of fun. We had a friend named [Jackson Johnson] Jack Shinkle who went to Choate with us. He was from St. Louis. Having some from a wealthy family, he had been raised in great luxury. I don't really think of St. Louis today as being a southern city, but Shinkle had very strong feelings about the place of the negro. As a matter of fact, I've met him since and he's now completely changed — very big on integration. In his youth he was just the opposite. This was a great source of amusement to us and we were always trying to make trouble for him along this line. I remember we were driving along in the rain one day in Jack's station wagon. I was in the front seat next to Jack and Shinkle was in the seat immediately behind us. As we drove along Kennedy

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saw about six very large Negro laborers, who were obviously looking for a ride. It was raining hard and they were dirty and wet, having been sweating all day in a construction gang. Kennedy offered them a lift, asking them to get in the back with Shinkle. They were terribly polite and tried very hard not to crowd Shinkle. They all attempted to sit in the very back seat rather uncomfortably. No, excuse me, I have this slightly wrong. Shinkle was many in the back and they were very careful not to sit with him. They all tried to crowd in the middle seat. Kennedy noticed this and said, "I'm having a little trouble with the steering, men. There's too much weight in the front. Would you mind, all of you, sitting in the backseat with my friend." So they all crowded all over Shinkle — sat

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on him, sat around him and everything else. Shinkle almost died, and we had a very good laugh.

SOHIER: Maybe, we could spend a little time on family life at the various places where the family gathered, such as vacations during the summer. One thing that has always been of interest to me is the effect of the anti-Irish,

anti-Catholic attitudes that I guess caused them to move from Boston to New York. What effect did that have on the family?

BILLINGS: I think that Mr. Kennedy pretty well took care of that, in moving to New York. In his youth he had been exposed to class prejudice, and he made sure this would not happen to his children. As you know, I didn't know Jack at the time he lived in Boston; actually, he was only nine when Mr. Kennedy moved the whole family

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down to Riverdale. I didn't think Jack ever was exposed to any anti-Catholic feeling at that early age in Boston. At least, he never spoke of it. I'm sure he would have if it had made any impression on him. Of course, he was conscious of the existence of anti-Catholicism — and he certainly ran into it full force in his later years in politics but never in his youth.

SOHIER: When he was at Choate, for example, there were a lot of dances in New York, you remember — I forget the name of them now and other things like that. Wasn't he sort of discriminated against, in this sort of thing?

BILLINGS: I can only think about it in terms of whether I was invited and he wasn't. Of course, we were both really from out of town, his living in

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Bronxville didn't count. I don't remember any [debutante] deb party that I went to in New York, as a boy from Pittsburgh, that he didn't go to. I don't really remember ever, in my long period of growing up with him, any occasion where he wasn't invited if I were. We were both invited to quite a few debutante parties and other dances as we were growing up. In most cases, I'd get him into the parties of those I knew; he would do the same for me. I really don't think that the Kennedy children were ever really exposed to anti-Catholicism themselves.

SOHIER: Was this the reason, maybe, that the family was sort of self-sufficient and, although they may have all brought home friends, you said Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy didn't really have much of a social life outside the family and the best way they could spend their time was together

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at the Cape or together at Palm Beach. Does that figure in it? Why was that? Was it the size of the family?

BILLINGS: I think you've touched on a lot of the reasons, and all of them are probably right. In the first place, I don't think Mr. Kennedy enjoyed social life. Perhaps, this was because none of his friends lived in the Hyannis Port

area. Certainly they couldn't have picked a more Protestant midwestern kind of resort. It's made up of almost 50 to 60 per cent Pittsburghers and I happen to come from Pittsburgh myself, and I know that anti-Catholicism existed very strongly in my youth in Pittsburgh. I don't think that Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy had any concern about not going out into whatever society there was in Hyannis Port. Certainly they took part in all the athletics. Mr. Kennedy's a great golfer as is Mrs. Kennedy,

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and they belonged to all the clubs and they used all the facilities of the yacht clubs, the tennis clubs, and the golf clubs. I don't think Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy probably ever went to any dances. I know they were not in the least interested, but also I do think that they just didn't know any of these people and the people didn't know them. And they were very self-sufficient. Certainly, as the children came along, there were parties. The children were invitees certainly to every party there was in Hyannis Port and there was no problem about the mixing of the Pittsburgh Protestant children and the Catholic Kennedy children. I know that when I used to visit the Kennedys I knew a lot of the boys and girls in Hyannis Port better than they did, because I'd been raised with them in Pittsburgh, but this didn't mean they weren't invited to

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whatever went on. I don't think that they probably went as often as they could have, because it was a very self-sufficient family. They had everything that they needed at home. They had their own movies; they had all their own athletic facilities. Usually all the children had their own friends visiting them.

SOHIER: What sort of friends came down? For example, did the girls bring down boyfriends? How did that work out?

BILLINGS: Of course, we have to go a little further on, because you have to remember the age differences in the girls….

SOHIER: [Eunice Kennedy] Eunice and Kick, I guess….

BILLINGS: Eunice seems exactly our age now,

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but Eunice is five or six years younger than we are, and, of course, this was a heck of a difference in those days. But as we got older — and I mean when we were in our twenties Eunice did things with us. Of course, Kick always did. Kick was two years older than Eunice. We became very familiar with the girls' different boyfriends through the years. None of the girls got married until they were thirty with the exception of Kick, who, of course, married in England. Boys often visited the girls on weekends — but they seldom came back twice.

SOHIER: Was that a pretty tough routine?

BILLINGS: I'd say it was probably as tough as any I can think of. I always felt very sorry for them, because I would always think of how it would have been if I hadn't been raised with the Kennedys. I just

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couldn't imagine how I would have handled myself over a weekend, as a guest of one of the girls. Nobody was really interested in the girls' dates. There were too many things to do without worrying about some brand new individual. The girl, on the other hand, would finally get the feeling that the responsibility of her friend was sort of dragging on her. She had to be constantly thinking about him and missing some of the fun herself. The result was that she quite often ended up tired of having him around.

SOHIER: She was missing something?

BILLINGS: She was missing something and had to sort of take care of this individual who was uncomfortable because he couldn't play touch football as well as the Kennedy boys, or he didn't run down the beach fast enough,

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or he didn't play charades and "kick the can" as well as somebody else. The whole thing must have been a very harrowing experience. This wasn't, however, true of the girls who visited the boys.

SOHIER: I was going to ask about that.

BILLINGS: If they were attractive, they did very well.

SOHIER: The girls didn't gang up on the boys' pretty girlfriends?

BILLINGS: If they did, the girl would have had enough support from the boys.

SOHIER: Is there something to the statement that Mr. Kennedy was very clearly the guy who ran the set-up and, as the boys came along, they took charge? Is there something there? You know, you hear American families are run

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by the mothers. It doesn't sound like that's true in the Kennedy house.

BILLINGS: I never thought of it in that way. I think that Kennedy women developed some pretty strong personalities. None of them were ever pushed around

by their brothers. They have always loved and admired their brothers. This isn't any different today than it was when they were kids.

SOHIER: How many different girls did Jack Kennedy have around? Was it a different girl every weekend? Did they last long? You mentioned one that he was particularly fond of and that, perhaps, lasted longer than the others, but….

BILLINGS: No, I think it was very seldom that he had the same girl down more than one weekend.

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SOHIER: This wasn't because anybody gave him a hard time?

BILLINGS: No, no. I think he liked a new face and he liked to change around.

SOHIER: How much was Mr. Kennedy around the house? It's hard to imagine a man with that many business interests being able to spend the amount of time that you hear he didn spend with the family. During the period you visited there, at least when Jack Kennedy had grown up — was Mr. Kennedy there all the time? How did that work out?

BILLINGS: Again, I don't know anything about the period before Jack was fifteen. I have suspected that Mr. Kennedy probably wasn't around very much in the very early years of his marriage, because, at that time, he was

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making his fortune and so much of it was done on the West Coast. My understanding is tha the couldn't be home in the early years, so, when the oldest children were very young, Mrs. Kennedy had much of the responsibility. Frankly, from the time I was first there, I can never remember visiting the Kennedy house, whether Hyannis Port or Palm Beach or Bronxville when Mr. Kennedy wasn't there. In the years I knew him, Mr. Kennedy did practically all his business by telephone. Obviously, I was there during vacations, whether it was summer, Easter or Christmas. Perhaps he made a point of being there during those periods. Possibly, he was away some of the other times, and the younger children, who were home, didn't see him during that period. I really can't answer that. All I know is that, from the time Jack was fifteen his father was always there

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when he was.

SOHIER: If he was doing business at home, did he ever discuss the business deals with Jack?

BILLINGS: I can answer that in one word — never.

SOHIER: Why is that? Didn't Jack want to know? Did he really not want him to get into this?

BILLINGS: We've talked about this a little before. I feel, and this is just observation, that Mr. Kennedy really, purposefully, didn't want his children to become interested in business. This is the one area where I'm sure he exerted influence, because he was determined that they would go into public service. He felt that too few boys with the proper background and training were making the government their career. He felt this was the responsibility of his boys.

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SOHIER: You read that Mr. Kennedy set up a trust fund of, I think, a million dollars for each of the children, and he's quoted as having said, that the reason he did this was because he wanted them to be independent, they could thumb their nose at him when they came into their money. Is that a correct statement?

BILLINGS: Yes. I think it is correct. Financially, possibly they could have. You can be damned sure none of them ever did. They had too much respect for him, aside from that, all the Kennedy children really love their father. Of course, in making them financially independent he probably took his chances but he never had this problem. None of his children would have ever wanted to cross him.

SOHIER: Mr. Kennedy was an emotional man, I think,

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and maybe you'd compare, for example, Jack Kennedy. I don't think he was as emotional as his father. What about Joe? Could you say something in terms of that?

BILLINGS: I really couldn't say whether Joe was. I would say Joe probably wasn't. But maybe I'm wrong. I think, many people not knowing Mr. Kennedy very well, would say he was very cold and unemotional.

SOHIER: That's quite incorrect, isn't it?

BILLINGS: I'd say he's emotional in areas where his emotions are aroused, but this is really limited to his feelings for his family.

SOHIER: Jack Kenendy was not particularly emotional as a person, was he? I realize we're really looking over his entire life here rather than just these years, but did you ever see him cry about

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something or express emotion? Maybe he didn't talk about it very much.

BILLINGS: He never would have talked about it. He would have done everything in his power to hide his emotions. But, I think, he was a very normal kind of a person in his feelings — I mean he was not over or under emotional. Knowing him as well as I did, of course, I have seen him cry. I certainly don't think he was cold in any way. He had a very warm personality. I think he cared a great deal about people and his feelings of loyalty were far above average. I'd go even further, I never knew anyone with stronger feelings of loyalty.

SOHIER: He really stuck with his friends, didn't he? You're, of course, a leading example from Choate all the way through to his death, but there are a

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a number of others — he never lost his friends. It seemed to me that he was always interested in them. Isn't that so?

BILLINGS: I think that anytime that he really established in his own mind that a man was his friend he never deserted him. His feeling of loyalty to that person never lessened. This was true even when his loyalty was sorely tried.

SOHIER: Could you give me some examples?

BILLINGS: I think that I can give better examples of people who were not necessarily his best friends — but were people he cared about. It's well known that the President had eight or nine very close friends when he died, all of whom he had known for at least fifteen years, and some for over thirty years. These friends were devoted to him

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always and he to them. On the other hand, he had a very wide circle of acquaintances — some of whom were most important to him. Often they had been people whom he had known through different periods of his career. I can think of two who had been his friends — yet they gave him many heartaches, both of them had played important parts in his career. I think that it was very difficult for him to ever conceive of any reason why they would turn against him. It took him a long time, I think, to decide in his own mind that he was going to forget them.

SOHIER: These are not close friends that you're talking about now?

BILLINGS: No, these were people who were very important to him at one time.

SOHIER: Maybe we could go into this specifically?

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BILLINGS: These two people turned on him for the same reason. One is Arthur Krock, who had been a friend of Mr. Kennedy and later had been Jack's friend.

SOHIER: He used to be around at the Cape, didn't he?

BILLINGS: Yes, oh yes. He was a good friend of his father's. Mr. Kennedy and Arthur Krock had many dinners together with the children present. Arthur Krock was a man with a stimulating mind. I think, for this reason, Mr. Kennedy liked him. He appeared loyal to Mr. Kennedy at that time. Mr. Kennedy liked to have him around. Jack saw a lot of him as he was growing up, and Arthur Krock took a great interest in Jack. He recognized Jack's potential at an early date.

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TAPE THREE OF THE SECOND INTERVIEW

SOHIER: Lem, we were in the middle of talking about Arthur Krock and his early friendship with Jack Kennedy and long friendship with Mr. Kennedy and how things seemed to go awry.

BILLINGS: I think that one of the reasons that Jack liked Arthur Krock through the years was that Mr. Krock was one of the first people who saw the potential in Jack Kennedy. I know that they kept in contact and Jack liked corresponding with him. I believe they kept in very close contact through the Harvard years. There was certainly admiration on the part of Jack and apparently it was mutual. In his senior year, Jack wrote his thesis, as everybody knows, on why England was not

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prepared for World War II. Arthur Krock read it and felt that it was good enough, with some rewriting, to make a good book. With Mr. Krock's encouragement, Jack rewrote it in the summer of 1940. It was published by Wilfred Funk, Inc., a new publishing house at that time. I remember Jack had some trouble finding a publisher. The established publishers were not interested. Henry Luce III did write the forward. I can't remember who asked him to do this. Perhaps, it was Mr. Kennedy — it seems strange now. However, there was a degree of closeness between [Clare Boothe] Mrs. Luce and Jack.

SOHIER: Was it through Mr. Kennedy?

BILLINGS: Well, I guess it was in the beginning. I'm really talking about Krock now. It's interesting that Arthur Krock wrote the following about *Why England Slept*, in *The New York*

Times — "I think Mr. Kennedy's account of the reasons for England's failure to rearm draws an unmistakable lesson for the people of the United States, which they should not neglect to study." That is a very strong statement for a man of Mr. Krock's renown to say about a twenty-one year old boy's book. Actually he was right. The book became a bestseller. It was acclaimed by the press as a very unusual book by so young a man.

SOHIER: As you go through the years with Jack Kennedy, what happened between him and Arthur Krock and how did this affect him?

BILLINGS: It's very difficult for me to know what happened to Arthur Krock, but I do know its effect on Jack Kennedy. Somewhere along the line, and I can't say where or when and I can't remember in what part of

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Jack's career it happened, Arthur Krock became very critical of Jack in his column, supercritical. He seemed to pick on him with purpose. He was critical not only orally but in his column about Jack and many of the things Jack did. This criticism was not only unfair but sometimes very picayune. It was very, very hard on Jack, because Jack through the years, had felt an admiration for this man, this learned columnist. Jack always appreciated Mr. Krock's early encouragement. So, no matter how mean and spiteful Arthur Krock became, and certainly the record shows he did, Jack always read everything he wrote and always felt badly and just couldn't understand why he was doing it. After Jack became President, Mr. Krock became even more spiteful and was so unfair and critical that I think Jack, by the time he

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died, had lost any feeling of admiration or friendship for him. Mr. Krock lost him completely but it took a long time — because of Jack's very strong feeling of loyalty.

SOHIER: You think this was a personal thing? Just to be the devil's advocate, one could say that Mr. Krock's views might have been quite different from those of Jack Kennedy, and, yet, still he might have wanted to remain a friend. Could one remain a friend, let's say as a newspaperman and, having different views, criticize Senator Kenendy, President Kennedy, and still be a friend on a personal basis?

BILLINGS: Well, it was my understanding, that it was more than just a difference of views. He wrote spiteful, mindful words about Jack. It would be interesting to look up and see exactly what it was he wrote

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about the President, and whether it was just a matter of a different point of view. My impressions are that it wasn't just that but something deeper. Certainly, anyone who knew Jack Kennedy knows that, through the years, there were many people who were highly critical of him in the

press but with whom later, as he achieved office after office, he was able to keep friendly. He certainly was not one of those vengeful people as so many politicians are. He didn't hold grudges. It seemed to me, that Arthur Krock completely changed his feelings about the President. I seem to be reaching into different areas, because I really don't know Arthur Krock well, but I feel it might be something like a man in his December years, watching a young man, whom he had befriended, reach enormous success without further help. Possibly there's some spiteful jealousy.

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This is a normal but unfortunate human trait.

SOHIER: Of course, that was an awfully tough role for a newspaper columnist who was also a friend of Jack Kenendy, particularly when he's President. One thinks of some of his closest friends in Washington who were in the newspaper business — [Benjamin C.] Ben Bradlee, [Charles] Charlie Bartlett, [Rowland] Rowlie Evans. I know that they felt he always read what they wrote and he called then if he didn't like it.

BILLINGS: Of course three people that you named, they were fair — they didn't do anything that was mean or spiteful.

SOHIER: But you feel that Jack Kennedy felt that Mr. Krock was being spiteful, not just calling it differently from his own view?

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BILLINGS: This was my impression. Now, I'm not speaking with authority on exactly what he wrote; my impressions are from Jack Kennedy's reactions.

SOHIER: Did he have this reaction to any other reporters who were friends of his or whom he knew very well? I recall that, and this obviously will be picked up in another interview, didn't he have a run-in with Ben Bradlee at one point?

BILLINGS: Yes, he did have one, and I think he felt that Ben Bradlee on more than one occasion had taken advantage of his friendship in his reporting.

SOHIER: That's a somewhat different point.

BILLINGS: That's a different point.

SOHIER: It was factual material that was available to him only because of his relationship?

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BILLINGS: I don't think he ever talked of Ben Bradlee being spiteful or doing anything to intentionally try to hurt him. I think Jack felt, and probably rightly so, that he was using material that he shouldn't have used, because of his closeness to the President. I must add, even though Jack felt that way and told Ben how he felt, this didn't change his feelings towards him. Ben continued to be a friend of his to the day he died. Of course, Ben was never a close friend like Charlie Bartlett.

SOHIER: And whose loyalties were such that he could never have had them interfere even with his professional career, I would gather.

BILLINGS: I think that Charlie handled himself very well and I think, on the whole, the President thought he did.

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SOHIER: It was awfully difficult to do.

BILLINGS: It was a terribly difficult thing.

SOHIER: Did the President recognize that it was difficult?

BILLINGS: He did and he had some awfully tough times with Charlie because there were times when Charlie might have reported something that was unintentionally wrong and, since it came from Charlie, it made it more difficult for the President. But, I must say, the President never got upset with him. They both tried to work out whatever the problems were.

SOHIER: I must say the members of the family don't take criticism very easily even if there's no evidence of it being spiteful. In other words, during this period when he was President, Senator, anybody who

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wrote anything that didn't come out pretty favorably got the real frost treatment from the family. You feel that Jack Kennedy understood the problem and that the Krock thing was something over and above that?

BILLINGS: I think the Krock thing was over and beyond that. I'm sorry I can't really pin down exactly what it was. I'm just reporting what I saw in the reaction of the President.

And as far as just the general criticism in the press of Jack Kennedy as a congressman, senator, or president, nobody read his press criticism with greater displeasure than Jack Kenendy. In fact, he read his bad press much more thoroughly than his good press, and usually, got himself all excited about it, calling up to find out this, that, and the other. I think it was a form of excitement

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for him. He certainly got more adrenaline going with bad press than with good.

SOHIER: I remember one time [McGeorge] Mac Bundy telling me that the President had asked him to have lunch with David Lawrence and kind of straighten him out, because he was upset by his views. I remember saying, "I should think he'd be almost happy to see that David Lawrence didn't approve of him, because that showed that, maybe, things were going all right." He did seem to really be upset about any criticism, from whatever source.

BILLINGS: That's a pretty good example — he didn't like David Lawrence, David Lawrence irritated him, but he certainly read David Lawrence more avidly than he read somebody who was always with him.

SOHIER: What about Mrs. Luce? She was close to

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him, wasn't she, for a period there?

BILLINGS: Yes, there was a period when Mrs. Luce was at the height of her career — when she was a Congresswoman and had been a successful playwright. I think this was the era when she was young enough to not yet be sour. During this period she met him and recognized his talents and his intellectual capacities and encouraged him. I think possibly out of this came the Luce forward to this book. I think it was around the same period. I do know that, in the early days, Mrs. Luce gave him great encouragement and I think he admired her mind and was flattered that she would be interested in him.

SOHIER: Did they have lunch together, or write letters?

BILLINGS: I'd say probably both and, possibly,

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when the Luces had a dinner, they might have asked him.

SOHIER: Was there a falling out there at any point?

BILLINGS: I don't know if there was a falling out. All I know is that she turned bitter along the years too, in a way similar to Arthur Krock and began writing very critical things about him. I don't really know the reason. I know Mrs. Luce and I've talked to her. As a matter of fact, I think what she would say about him would be "Yes, I did know him, but he certainly has forgotten all about me and what I did for him." This

was the general trend of her conversations with me. We're all aware of the really bitter kind of things she wrote about him while he was President.

SOHIER: How do you account for this?

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BILLINGS: Mrs. Luce's criticism was not half as important to him as that of Arthur Krock. Arthur Krock was much more deeply a part of his matriculation. He was, however, disappointed that his relationship with Mrs. Luce turned out the way it did. He actually invited Mrs. Luce to the White House, when he was President. We certainly know she had been awfully mean and bitter in her writings.

SOHIER: Did they invite Mrs. Luce to the White House because she was very influential and appealed to a certain group?

BILLINGS: No, I think they invited her because she had been a friend. That was the way Jack was. He didn't really hold long grudges. I think that was the end of it, because I think right after that she wrote something again. That was the end of her as far as he

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was concerned. He didn't try anymore. I guess we started all this by talking about his loyalty to his friends. It took an awful lot to make him drop a friend.

SOHIER: Most people, I guess, tend to lose their prep school friends and even their college friends as they move through various periods of their life. That's anything but the pattern of Jack Kennedy, isn't it? He really kept his friends, even though I guess, in some cases this wasn't too easy. I'm thinking of one friend that we both know — I guess we better leave his name out — who was a very bright guy at Harvard and a close friend of his.

BILLINGS: Yes, I know who you mean — you mea Langdon Marvin. Of course, he was never a close friend even at Harvard. Marvin did do well at Harvard and

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actually was one of the young hopefuls of Jack's class. While Jack was in Washington, Marvin, who at one time had a good mind, was interested in studying all sorts of things, and I think, Jack made available to him certain places to study and was generally helpful. Unfortunately, for some reason, Marvin's whole attitude toward life sort of deteriorated and he became pretty much of a nuisance. Jack felt sorry for him and didn't like to drop him. He continued to try to help him

until it became just absolutely impossible. Jack hated to turn his back on him just because he was having some sort of psychological set back, or whatever his problems were.

I think it is interesting, because I, frankly, haven't had another friend whom I've known as long as Jack Kennedy. I think it is unusual, at my age, to have

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had a close friend for over thirty years. There must have been something about him that kept people wanting him to be their friend through the years. Much more interesting, I suppose, is why he wanted to keep all those old friends, since his mind and interests really did grow, let's face it, at a much faster clip than any of his contemporaries.

SOHIER: Well, your interests and his certainly didn't run parallel through all of those years. Yet, the bond didn't change any, did it?

BILLINGS: I really don't think it did. I suppose it must have changed a little, but I probably spent more time with him than any of his friends, even during his years in the Presidency.

SOHIER: What did he want from friends? What did he need from them? What did he want to give them?

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For example, his desire when he was with you wasn't necessarily to bounce off ideas about Cuban policy and see what you thought about them. He did that all day at the office, presumably, at the White House. What do you think it was that friends did for him?

BILLINGS: I think probably each one of his friends offered something different. In my case, he relaxed with me because I didn't really talk to him about any political matters or any of the matters he had had on his mind all during his work week, and I mean this from the time he was a Congressman on through the Presidency. I don't know that we had a lot of things in common. I guess just the fact that we'd known each other intimately for thirty-two years is a pretty strong bond in itself, so I felt that I understood him, understood his sense of

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humor and he understood mine. I guess, just by habit, that we continued to enjoy each other. It's very easy to see why I enjoyed him. I suppose that he felt the same way. I think that was it. Probably having me around was relaxing, because he knew me so well. I don't know what else it was.

SOHIER: This makes me think about something else, in terms of the whole Kennedy family; they are all very close mouthed and always keep personal things

within the family. You grew up with the family — was the President more confidential with you?

BILLINGS: Perhaps this was our common bond. He had never been secretive with me. We grew up as boys together and we shared secrets, or whatever you might call them. He always told me things and he never held anything

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back from me.

SOHIER: You were treated like a member of the family?

BILLINGS: Well, even more. In this area, I knew more about his personal life than his family did. I certainly did in his youth. You asked why we were close. Maybe it was because he could really tell me everything. He knew through the years that I never told anybody.

SOHIER: And things he would tell you were for you and not for the family?

BILLINGS: Certainly not for the family. If he wanted them to know anything he'd tell them himself. Although, obviously, I know them very well, I really don't know any of them as I knew Jack and the longer he

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is dead, the more I realize this. No one in the family shares their confidences with me as Jack did, and with reason. Why should they? I think they are extremely careful of what they say on every personal subject. Perhaps they tell me more than most people — but I certainly know comparatively little now.

SOHIER: This, let's say secrecy discretion kind of thing was something that stemmed from Mr. Kennedy?

BILLINGS: You know I was never conscious of it until the President's death whatever we're talking about. He probably knew what they did and so I knew it. I knew it from him. So it's only since he died that I'm conscious that probably there are a lot of things that go on in the family which I don't know about. I guess it's because it's a close family unit and it's just that.

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Mr. Kennedy always said that the family should stick together. He said the family would be happier as one unit than if they broke up into separate individual families.

SOHIER: Was there a feeling that there was a sort of hostile world surrounding them — that "we keep things to ourselves that we don't want people knowing about"?

BILLINGS: No, I wouldn't think so.

SOHIER: That wasn't the atmosphere?

BILLINGS: No, I wouldn't think so at all. I think it was just a close family feeling that it was nobody else's business but their own. They keep their privacy within the family unit — to share things with each other and no one else.

SOHIER: I remember one or two members of the

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family saying to me in a joking way, "Boy, if you tell anything to Johnny (meaning Jack Kennedy) that's the way to get it out", as if he was sort of the least discreet.

BILLINGS: Well, maybe he was.

SOHIER: He didn't have that same feeling?

BILLINGS: No, he didn't.

SOHIER: That doesn't ring a bell in any way?

BILLINGS: Well, it might be true, because I know he told me things, but I don't know whom else he told. Don't misunderstand me, Jack was very close mouthed on anything that was important. Although he did tell me some very exciting things that were going on — again, because I'm sure he knew I wouldn't repeat anything.

SOHIER: In what area would this be?

BILLINGS: I knew about Cuba.

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SOHIER: I think we want to get to that later, but I think you were with him during the height of that.

BILLINGS: I was with him during the Bay of Pigs episode — as well as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

SOHIER: Maybe we ought not to get into that at this point, but, in terms of the chronology here, I think that to go back a little bit. In the summer of 1935, Jack Kennedy went to the London School of Economics; then started off in September of 1935 at Princeton; became sick, and went to Arizona to recuperate. This brings us to the summer of 1936, before he entered Harvard. I think that you have covered the Princeton period probably as much as you want to in your first interview. What about the summer of 1936? Does that stand out in any particular way? This, I guess, was a summer at the Cape?

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BILLINGS: It's funny, but I really don't remember. Undoubtedly I was there. I just have to try and really think what I did in the summer of 1936. I wish I had some reference points to go by. It's awfully difficult to take a summer in my life and remember what I did.

SOHIER: You kept a diary for some period. Was this only after he became President?

BILLINGS: I only kept a daily diary during our European trip in 1937.

SOHIER: But you didn't keep a diary otherwise?

BILLINGS: No, I didn't.

SOHIER: Then he entered Harvard in September 1936 and, although you were at Princeton, you saw him a lot during this period, didn't you?

BILLINGS: Yes, I did. I saw him an awful lot.

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He did come down on weekends to New York. Whenever he did, I would always meet him there and we'd get dates and go out.

SOHIER: Would you give an example of an evening? What happened on a weekend like that?

BILLINGS: It's interesting because, of course, Jack always had a lot of money and I never had any. My father was not living and I was a scholarship student at Princeton and I really had no spending money at all. But he was able to acclimate himself, apparently with no problem, to anything that I was able to do. I would hitchhike to New York and meet him there. We'd have dates and then he would possibly have his family's car. That would be great when he did.

SOHIER: Where did you stay?

BILLINGS: We usually stayed in Bronxville.

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SOHIER: Oh, that's right, they were there.

BILLINGS: Yes, and if he'd have his family's car, it was very easy. If he didn't have the car, we had a problem, because we really didn't have any place to stay in New York. We frequently went to the Stork Club. In those days, that was the place to go, and the Stork Club was very anxious to attract young people. They particularly encouraged young models and pretty girls to come there, and they made things easier for the boys who brought pretty girls. They thought it good business to have pretty girls in the Club.

SOHIER: In fact, if you were well-known, you didn't get a very big check, as I recall, and there were presents.

BILLINGS: Well, I don't know. They were more

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interested in, as I remember, the girls than they were in the boys, no matter how well-known the boys were. It was Sherman Billingsley's philosophy that if you brought pretty girls to the Stork, it wasn't expensive, because he liked to decorate the place with beauty. There were presents for the girls and champagne, etc. Of course, we were always very careful never to have more than one drink each while we were there. Never more than that.

SOHIER: Why?

BILLINGS: Because we couldn't spend any more than that.

SOHIER: Actually Jack Kenendy wasn't much of a drinker, was he?

BILLINGS: No, he wasn't much of a drinker, so it wasn't any hardship to take one drink.

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SOHIER: He wasn't much of a dancer, was her?

BILLINGS: Oh, yes.

SOHIER: He liked to dance?

BILLINGS: He liked to dance very much.