

John Jay Hooker Jr. Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 1965
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Biographical Note

John Jay Hooker Jr. was the National Director of Men and Women for the Kennedy Campaign in Washington D.C. in 1960 and special assistant to Robert F. Kennedy from 1961 to 1962. This interview focuses on personal anecdotes about the Kennedy family, the 1960 presidential campaign, and the JFK administration's relations with Cuba, among other topics.

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By John Jay Hooker, Jr.

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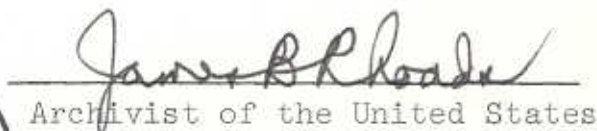
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John Jay Hooker, Jr.



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John Jay Hooker Jr.– JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

JOHN JAY HOOKER, JR.

Nashville, Tennessee

By William A. Geoghegan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GEOGHEGAN: I am William A. Geoghegan, Assistant Deputy Attorney General, the Department of Justice. I am here in the office of John Jay Hooker, Jr., an attorney in Nashville, Tennessee, to interview Mr. Hooker in connection with the John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Project. Mr. Hooker, I'll begin by asking you when it was that you first encountered President Kennedy and who it was who introduced you to him?

HOOKER: Well, Bill, if I might, let me give you a little background. I first met President Kennedy in Hyannis Port. He was then, of course, a senator and that was in 1958. Previously I had met [Robert F.] Bob Kennedy, who came to Nashville to testify in an impeachment trial in which I was a lawyer. This was the first impeachment trial in fifty years. It was a major event in Tennessee and Bob Kennedy came down as Chief Counsel from the McClellan Committee to testify.

At the conclusion of his testimony he asked me if I would take him out to the Hermitage, which was the home of Andrew Jackson. I was very busy in this case and I really didn't have time to do that, but because he was a guest and wanted to, I did take him. The plan was for him to stay fifteen minutes and then he was going to catch a plane and go back to Washington. We got there and he called his wife,

Ethel, [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] and said that he was at the Hermitage and that he was intrigued by it and wanted to stay longer and that he would catch a later plane. He then spent four hours going through the home of Andrew Jackson and during this time discussing Andrew Jackson and American history and events, and I remember as we left the grounds of the Hermitage-- I was in the presence of Bob Kennedy and John Seigenthaler, who later turned out to be an intimate friend of Bob Kennedy's, but he was, like myself at that time, only an acquaintance--I remember thinking to myself that Bob Kennedy has a real feeling that American history is of great importance and that he has the feeling that he and his family are going to be part of future American history and he had spent this time at the Hermitage for the purpose of gathering from the past some of the spirit of America. I remember it just as if it were yesterday. Watching him go through the Hermitage for four hours left me with the feeling that I had met a young man who was going to be a part of the future of America.

Shortly thereafter he called me and said that he wanted to come to Nashville and buy a pony for the children and he would like to spend the weekend with me. He came and spent the weekend and Ethel came. I was at that time engaged to the girl [Letitia Forte] to whom I'm now married and we had a very pleasant forty-eight hours together, at the end of which I felt that I was his friend and that he was my friend. Shortly thereafter, he invited me to go to Hyannis Port to spend the weekend in the summer of 1958. I did that and on that occasion Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] and the Senator were there, Steve Smith and his wife [Jean Kennedy Smith], Bob and Ethel, Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] and Sargent Shriver, and maybe some other members of the family. And during that weekend I had some lengthy conversations with Steve Smith and Sargent Shriver and with Bob about the proposition that Senator Kennedy was going to run for President. The Senator did not participate particularly in the activities of that weekend for some reason. My meeting him was very brief and casual, but it was of sufficient length that I felt the magnetism and vitality of a man and had some feeling of the family group about which so much was later written.

We flew back to Washington; Bob and I flew back on the same plane. Arthur Goldberg got on the airplane in Boston and we flew back from Boston to Washington National. Bob got off at Washington. I had the very positive feeling, and said to my wife that I was convinced that John F. Kennedy was going to be the President of the United States. This was not because of any prior political experience on my part or any profound political insight, because up until that time I had had only a limited amount of activity in politics. The feeling that he was going to be the President emanated from his vitality, his countenance, what has subsequently been called "that special grace." It was obvious to me and, I think, obvious to most everybody who saw him that he was a unique human being. I was enormously impressed by his family as a family group, by the friendship and by the inter-dynamics of the relationships of each member to the other. It appeared to me that if you were a friend of one of them you were a friend of all of them, that if Bob liked you and you were a friend of Bob's, that you immediately had an entrée to the other members of the family. And that was the feeling of the weekend.

GEOGHEGAN: During this weekend was any suggestion made to you about what you might do if the decision was finally made for Senator Kennedy to become a candidate for the presidency in 1960?

HOOKE: No. As I said before, I hadn't had any political experience and mainly it was a question of my asking Steve Smith and Bob questions about how they visualized making this dream a reality. I can't say that I remember whether it was by word or just feeling, but there was no doubt in my mind that if they did do it I was going to give some of my time to helping in the cause. But in terms of having been invited in the sense of being designated to perform a certain function, that wasn't my relationship. I felt that I would do something but I didn't know what.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you feel when you left Bob Kennedy and the other members of the family of Senator Kennedy that weekend that the decision had been finally made, as far as the Senator and his family were concerned, that he would be a candidate or that it was just about to be made?

HOOKER: Yes, I felt that the decision had been made but I wasn't certain in what form the decision was made. Like a lot of other American citizens, I would really like to know how the decision was made. My opinion from that weekend and from my subsequent experiences with the President and with Bob is that the decision for Jack Kennedy to run for President of the United States was not a decision that was made concisely or within the neat framework of yes or no, but that it was a decision that emanated from a whole series of events. I think I felt at the time I saw him that he was so thoroughly involved in American life--in making speeches, in knocking out a program and concepts about what he thought the country should do--I felt that that had emanated and had grown naturally. It was just an assumption on the part of all the people who were really close to him--that if the opportunity presented itself, he would answer the call. Now it may be that somebody knows that the decision was made otherwise. I don't know about that. But it was more of a feeling of involvement, a feeling that this man was going to do what came naturally, that he was going to respond to what was obviously a deeply engrained urge to serve his country which had been passed to him from his father and his mother and had been shared with his brothers, the one who was dead, [Joseph P., Jr.] Joe, and with both [Edward Moore] Teddy and Bob.

GEOGHEGAN: Was there any mention made at this time of Joseph Kennedy, Jr., the brother who lost his life in World War II, or at any subsequent time?

HOOKER: When we walked out of the Hermitage--I didn't really know much about the Kennedy family. This was, as I say, the first time I had met Bob Kennedy--I asked Bob how many brothers and sisters he had and he named them and he included Kathleen and Joe. I said, "Where is Joe?" He looked at me and without the slightest embarrassment or the slightest hesitation, he said, "He's in heaven." And it made a great impression on me, the matter-of-fact way he said it and the fact that I was sure he believed it. And I said, "Oh, I didn't know that." And he told me how he was killed. I inquired of him about Kathleen and he told me how she was killed.

I was, of course, interested in the Kennedy family from the very beginning, but the interest, beginning back at the time he testified down here, really centered around a feeling of the solidarity of Bob Kennedy. That was before my visit to Hyannis Port and before I had any conviction really about his brother becoming the President. My conviction at the time of the Hermitage episode was more related to Bob and Bob's consciousness of history and Bob's desire to participate. At that time I had not met Senator Kennedy. But because of the personality of Bob Kennedy on that occasion I developed an interest in the family as a whole. When he said, "Joe's in heaven," it made me wonder, because of the calmness and of the obvious sincerity of his expression, about the family, about Bob's background and about his mother and father and how he had grown up and how this feeling of religious conviction had been imparted in him. I became very interested in talking to him about his father and we spent a great deal of time talking about his father. He told me how he was raised and what took place at the dinner table.

GEOGHEGAN: John, did Bob Kennedy at any time relate some incidents or stories that his father told or that involved his father at these dinner table sessions which have become rather famous with respect to the Kennedy family?

HOOKE: Bill, a few weeks or months later Bob Kennedy came down to speak at the University of Kentucky at Lexington. He called me and asked me if I would drive up to Lexington and pick him up and bring him back to Nashville so he could spend the night. He was going to make another speech in Mississippi and I remember very vividly driving up. At that time, my wife had a convertible. She and I drove up to Lexington and picked him up, and it was a warm spring day. This must have been the spring of 1959. I remember he immediately put the top down and took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves and he said that he wanted to drive. And he did. We spent four and a half hours driving back to Nashville. In the course of that visit we stopped off first and saw the home of Henry Clay. When he said he wanted to go to the home of Henry Clay right outside of Lexington, I could envision another

four-hour episode. I didn't feel that I was as great a historian as he was, and while I wanted to see the home of Henry Clay, I didn't want to spend four hours there. So, with some urging from me, I got him out of Henry Clay's house in about an hour. But again I had this feeling he was devouring the history of the country. He knew a great deal about Henry Clay already and then we also, late on the trip, stopped and saw the Lincoln monument in (Hodgenville) Kentucky--and the Log Cabin. We spent, I would say, another thirty or forty minutes there in which he discussed Lincoln and again drank deep of the history and the beginnings of Abraham Lincoln.

But during this long drive we discussed at length his family and how he felt about his father and his mother and, particularly, I was interested in how they had raised the children. He told me that his father was absent a great deal of the time when he was growing up, but that on major occasions, a birthday or some holiday or weekends, he was frequently at home and when he was at home, he made a very special effort to play with each of the children and to engage them in an individual relationship. I think Bob Kennedy felt that he not only had a relationship with his father, Joe Kennedy, which was a relationship as part of the group, but I think he felt he had a very individual relationship with him. I think, from what he said, his other brothers and sisters also felt this propinquity with their father, this individual relationship with him, that was separate and apart from their group relationship with him. In their group relationship with him I think, from what Bob told me, he made efforts to give them a set of values in terms of trying to stimulate their interests in life and in government and trying to point out to them more by indirection than direction what he, Joseph Kennedy, thought about life and about government and how human beings should approach the business of living.

For example, he said that at the dinner table they never were permitted to discuss money. Money was a subject that was taboo. If the subject would come up about the cost of something or relating to money, it would immediately be diverted either by his mother or father to something that related to family doings, family feelings about where they should go on a vacation, about some family matter or to some current event. Apparently they spent a great deal of time at the table in convivial meals discussing current events and what was happening in the world and the personalities that were known to Mr.

Joseph P. Kennedy, many of whom the children on occasion met, like President [Franklin D.] Roosevelt and most of the famous people of that time, even while they were young. . . . As you probably know, Bill, Bob has pictures on the wall in his house of a great many of the past presidents. He has one that is autographed by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and there is a letter attached to it that President Roosevelt sent to him through his father, saying to him: "Dear Bob: Your father has told me of your interest in stamps and I want you to know that I am a stamp collector too, and the next time you are in Washington I hope you will stop by and see me." I mentioned this because Mr. Kennedy not only talked with them at the table about these things, but I think made a special effort to involve them individually in things so that Bob Kennedy as a child, having received a letter from the President of the United States, felt a more than passing involvement with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in what was termed as the New Deal, and his father's participation in the New Deal.

Apparently the conversations at the table were led by Mr. Kennedy. He would select, in effect, the subject and then everybody would talk about it. I think through this mechanism Mr. Kennedy tried to help the children develop an individuality, develop feelings which they were permitted to express, feelings that were perhaps in conflict with the feelings of one another or in conflict with the feelings of the father. I think the dominant impression I received about Bob's relationship to his daddy was that his father permitted him the luxury of disagreement, that his father did not require abject adherence to the feelings he had. He permitted each child to develop his own feelings and convictions which quality, I think, he passed to each child, maybe in a somewhat different way. But they regarded their father more as a friend and as an adviser and as a confidant than simply as an authority.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you detect any sense of fear of the father?

HOOKE: No, not fear, but I did detect what I thought was almost total respect. They felt that he was a tremendous human being, that they were

very much involved with him, and they wanted to please him. But at the same time they had been, as I say, permitted the luxury of disagreeing with him so that what they felt for him was not fear of reprisal, or fear of arbitrary discipline, but respect for his opinion, respect for his feelings, love, and a deep sense of identity. I think psychologically speaking that the Kennedy boys, each in his own way, beginning at a very early age, managed to make a very satisfactory psychological identity with their father which I think accounts in a large measure for their virility, for their inexhaustible energy, for their drive, and, on the other side of the coin, for their gentleness, especially the President. They are all masculine people, and I think that this largely resulted from this very early feeling of identity with which is, as you know, very important in the development of the personality. I think it was that type of background that gave them all in their own the facility to live their own lives.

During the Cuban crisis, when [Nikita] Khrushchev and the President were, so to speak, eyeball to eyeball, I remember having the very strong feeling that this nation could not have in the White House a man who was better emotionally equipped to make a judgment the effect of which could be annihilation, that he was devoid of some of the complexities that might lead other people into a trap. Jack Kennedy had not only for himself but for all people a profound desire to live and to work and to thrive. I did not feel that he would make any judgment that was hasty or that he would precipitate destruction due to any emotional incapacity to stand strain. I felt that he would be able to tolerate the strain of those days, that this great identity with his father, this ability to see himself as a leader, to have confidence in himself, to be willing to go to the point of looking Khrushchev in the eye and playing for all the chips--that because of all that here was a man who, because of his emotional upbringing, because of his emotional development, had the capacity to bring to this event the strong, stable emotional system that was a part of Jack Kennedy. He did that and I think that he conveyed that to the other people who were involved in that decision. I remember hearing President [Lyndon B.] Johnson say here in Nashville during the recent campaign that the coolest man in Washington during the Cuban crisis was John F. Kennedy. He said that to an audience of many thousands of people here in Nashville. I am sure that is

true because that's the way his whole personality seemed to be.

GEOGHEGAN: Tell me, John, did Bob ever indicate to you that the father had ever attempted to influence them to follow in particular careers?

HOOKER: Yes, I think the father, Mr. Kennedy, made it clear to them that he wanted them to do something with their lives that was worthwhile. I think he had made it clear to them that he thought the highest calling was government service, that they should all make their lives count for something. I don't feel that he required them to do that or that he left them with the feeling, that "If you don't do that, I won't love you." I don't think it was a conditional situation. I don't think they felt that they had to do what he wanted them to do. But I do feel that they developed this great respect for their father and they have been so well educated along the lines of their responsibility. I think he made them feel that this money he had made for them gave them the opportunity to really do something important--and that opportunity didn't just include making more money. I think he felt that he had made a sufficient amount of money that the pursuit of money to any further degree was not really worthwhile. I think Joe Kennedy respected people who made money but I think that after you got a certain amount of it and after he got a certain amount of it, his interests changed. Money for money's sake was not very appealing to Joe Kennedy. He felt he provided for his children in a manner so that the point of money could never really be a guiding influence, and I don't think it has been in any of their lives.

GEOGHEGAN: John, I would like you to comment, if you would, about what you observed concerning the relationship between the children and the [Rose Fitzgerald] mother now.

HOOKER: I only saw Mrs. Kennedy with Bob on one occasion. On the occasions that I was at Hyannis Port--I was there about three times--she was not there.

I saw Bob with his mother at his house on one occasion and he just adored her. She obviously had the capacity to love and she had conveyed to the children, I think, this great gentleness and a great capacity to love them. Certainly Bob felt warmed by his mother. I think that he wanted to do everything he could to make his mother's life more pleasant. I have talked mostly about the father because I did know Mr. Kennedy, I had many conversations with Mr. Kennedy. I was present in Hyannis Port in the conversation among Mr. Kennedy and the President and Bob and me--and I think maybe Ethel was present--in which they discussed . . .

GEOGHEGAN: [Was this after the Senator became President?

HOOKER: Yes, this was after the Senator had become President. I remember on that occasion that the President had on a sport shirt that I bought him, and he was sitting on the sofa with his shoes off and relaxed. Jackie, as a matter of fact, was sitting on the triple sofa with him and Bob was sitting on a chair and I was sitting on the steps, and Ethel was sitting on the steps. Mr. Kennedy walked in, and immediately everyone in the room sprang to their feet. The President of the United States, within a second, had his shoes on and was standing straight up to welcome his father into the room, I remember being impressed by the fact that he was the President but that to the President, Joseph P. Kennedy was his daddy. He had that deep respect for him. The fact that he was now the President hadn't changed their relationship or his emotional or instinctive reactions to his father. We had several meals there together, and I was impressed by the fact that Mr. Joseph Kennedy, Sr. sat at the head of the table and Jackie sat at the other end and that the President sat in the middle. It so happened at one or two occasions that I sat next to the President and I remember feeling, "Isn't this a peculiar situation to sit at the table where the President of the United States is not sitting at the head."

To revert back to Mrs. Kennedy, as I say, I didn't know Mrs. Kennedy well but from Bob and from Ted--I have been with them and with Eunice there was no doubt that Mrs. Kennedy was a special person to them all. And I think Mrs. Kennedy, during the years in which the father had spent so much time away from home and was so heavily involved in working so hard, had not only kept the homefires burning, but she managed to be

both mother and father to them during periods in which he was absent. They had a very deep seated love and affection for her. There is no doubt in my mind that she was a wonderful mother. Her children are an evidence of that.

GEOGHEGAN: [John, would you care to comment about whatever personality differences you observed among the three brothers which you knew, the President, Bob Kennedy, Ted Kennedy.

HOOKER: On one of my visits to Hyannis Port we were sitting at the dinner table, and Teddy and I got into a discussion about track. Somehow or other it developed into the question of who could outrun who--whether or not, if we got into a foot race, he would win or I would win. I'm about 6'1" and weight about 170 pounds and regarded myself as being one rather fleet of foot. At that time I was 28 or 29 years old, maybe 30. Teddy was about 6'1" but weighed about 215, and I couldn't believe that he could beat me in a foot race. The first thing I knew, dinner had been adjourned and we were all standing outside and Teddy and I were lined up to have this race. We had a hundred-yard dash and, embarrassingly enough, he won it. I couldn't believe it. It was just a couple of steps, so I tried it again, and he won it the second time. I said that I would have to submit.

We went back to the table, and for a few moments everybody kidded me about being a loser. The Kennedys love winners. They love to win. They are enormously competitive, but after a few minutes of being kidded about being a loser, I discovered that it was meaningful to them that I would race him, that I would meet him and contest him. So that while I think the Kennedys love--there has been a great deal written about how much they like to win and what emphasis they put upon winning--I think that to those who have been to Hyannis Port and have participated in all the various games, from tennis to touch football, anything that was available--foot racing, boating, water skiing--the Kennedys have a very profound respect for the competitor. What I am trying to get across is that it's not just the winning. I think of more importance to them is that you compete and that you make an effort. They put great emphasis on being willing to compete and willingness to make an effort, and I admire that. I feel that they all have this

trait in common.]

I would say about Teddy--I would say that Teddy was a very aggressive, competitive fellow who likes to win, likes a challenge. I, however, feel that he is more forgiving of error or inability than Bob. In other words, I don't feel that Teddy demands of himself the same degree of excellence that Bob demands of himself. I think that Teddy is highly motivated but not so highly motivated as Bob and that when Teddy loses. . . . I played tennis with Teddy on several occasions. I have played in the past a great deal of tennis in my life, played some considerable tournament tennis, and Teddy has just played tennis more as one of many sports and so he was no match for me playing tennis. He would take his defeat with--he didn't like it but it didn't seem to bother him. Whereas Bob, even though I had had so much more experience at it than he had and played so much more tennis than he had played, every time I had the feeling he felt that this time he would raise himself to the heights to beat me. Every time we played he tried to win. He did not like to accept the role of losing. He would try very, very hard and was very competitive. He always wanted to play one more set or one more game or one more point.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you have any opportunity to observe the President in this respect?

HOOKER: Only in the sense that he was a spectator. I never was around at any time in which he participated in any of the athletics, but it was my very firm impression that the President was much less rigid about winning or losing in sporting events and maybe in life in general. Maybe the President did not feel the same need to prove himself that the others did. He was a little bit more philosophical. He would smile at the events. He would be teasing and gay and he laughed spontaneously as a result. Bobby was a good sport. Both Bob and Ted were. I was always impressed that, despite their considerable competitiveness, they were always good sports. But the President was even more so. The President found a certain humor in the man-to-man struggle.

GEOGHEGAN: Do you think that this fierce competitive spirit Bob evidences, especially in athletics, may to some extent be explained by the fact that in physical stature he was considerably smaller than his brothers and that he probably had to put out extra effort to compete on the same level with them?

HOOKEK: Yes, I think that's right. I think that's true. Bob did have, to some degree because of his size, a more fierce sense of competitiveness but I don't know that that's the whole story. I think that Bob, even if he had been a larger man, might still have had that sense of competitiveness. I think it is just extremely deep-rooted in his nature.

GEOGHEGAN: John, you had an opportunity on many occasions to be with the President's wife, Jacqueline Kennedy. Would you give your impressions of her.

HOOKEK: Bill, Jackie Kennedy was not only an extremely attractive human being and poised lady, she was underneath that an especially gracious, kindly individual. During the whole 1960 campaign she was pregnant, and most of the time she stayed completely out of sight after the Democratic nomination in July. As you remember, she stayed at Hyannis Port during the Democratic nomination when I, along with most of the other troops, were in Los Angeles. After the Democratic nomination he returned to Hyannis Port and she did very little campaigning because of her pregnancy.

In late July, some few days after the Convention, after I had returned to Nashville, Tennessee, Bob called me and said that he wanted me to come to Washington and work in the campaign. I had had a minor role in the Convention at Los Angeles. I saw Bob a good deal during the Los Angeles Convention and saw the Senator, then the Democratic nominee, the morning after he was nominated. I went by to see Bob and he said, "Let's go up and see my brother." We went up to Senator Kennedy's quarters and walked through a long series of rooms and finally got to the last room in the suite. Senator Kennedy was sitting on the side of the bed putting his shoes on. When we walked in he, in that friendly way, asked me how I was doing. Bob and I sat down and he looked at me and he said, "Who do you think

ought to be vice president?" which was I guess the last question that I expected the new, Democratic nominee to ask. [BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I] The Senator was sitting on the side of the bed putting on his shoes. After he greeted me, he talked to Bob for a second and he looked at me in the straight-forward way that became so famous before he died and said, "Who do you think ought to be the vice presidential nominee?" It was the last thing I expected him to ask me. I hadn't been in a policy role, but he had that faculty for putting his finger on the ventricles. He obviously was thinking about it. I don't know whether he asked me for the purpose of getting my opinion or just for the purpose of seeing how I would react. But I said, I guess, the mundane thing; I said, "Senator, it looks to me like Senator Johnson and Senator [Stuart] Symington are both good Democrats, and if I were you, I would select the man that I thought could help me win because now that you have become the nominee, I think it is your duty to try to win." And that broad smile came across his face and he never responded to it nor asked me any further, but I felt some sense of electricity with him, that we were communicating. We had a very pleasant chat there and walked out of that room. I remember standing outside, waiting to see Senator Kennedy, were all the names I had read about. Governor [Michael V.] DiSalle was there, Carmen DeSapio was there. Almost the Who's Who in the Democratic Party was standing in the outer rooms. Having spent a few minutes inside, when I came out with Bob, I remember having the sensation of: who in the hell am I to have had this chance to visit with him when these other people were standing outside in the hall waiting to see him.

So when Bob called me a few weeks later, really a few days later, and said, "Will you come to Washington to work in the campaign?" despite the fact that it was going to involve a considerable financial sacrifice to me and a considerable professional inconvenience as I was a young lawyer in this community and could hardly afford an extended absence, immediately upon his asking that I come, I said that I would come. I did go in July and stayed until after the election in November. I was in a very peculiar position in that I was neither fish nor fowl; I was neither a proven political analyst, a proven member of the Kennedy team responsible for the success at Los Angeles, nor, on the other hand, was I an outsider. As a matter of fact the first few nights after I arrived in Washington in July I

stayed out at Bob's house. I finally got located and my friend, John Seigenthaler, likewise from Nashville, and I got an apartment and stayed together throughout the remainder of the campaign. But originally we stayed at Bob's house and that gave me access to him early in the morning and late at night. I rode in in the morning with him and went back out at night, and we had a great many interesting conversations during the trip to McLean, Virginia, Hickory Hill, where Bob lives, and Washington.

GEOGHEGAN: Let me interrupt you at this point. At this time was Bob confident of winning? What was his attitude toward the President's chances in November?

HOOKER: I don't believe that Bob ever thought about that question. I think certainly in July or August that we were definitely behind and that there was a sense of feeling at the Democratic National Committee that we were behind. The polls showed that we were behind and there was a feeling that there was a rough session of Congress going on, as you remember. We were having problems with certain legislation that Johnson and Kennedy wanted to get out of the committees and on the floor and voted upon, and that wasn't going particularly well. It was the general feeling--the Republican convention had come along after the Democratic convention and the general feeling was that Nixon was substantially ahead.

Bob Kennedy, however, never reflected neither optimism nor pessimism during this period of time. He simply reflected total involvement in his work. He did feel, I think, the central responsibility. After all, the nominee, Senator Kennedy, was his brother. He felt that any mistakes that were made from the Democratic Committee in Washington were his mistakes, even despite the fact that he wasn't the Chairman of the Democratic Committee. Senator [Henry M.] Jackson was, and Bob was simply campaign manager. But in response to your question, during that time--I'm trying to meaningfully convey to you my feeling that at very close-hand observation--during that time he was so involved that I don't think he ever allowed himself the luxury of contemplating what the end results was going to be. Bob Kennedy during that period, July and August, was like a prize

fighter who was unconscious of the fact that he was being hit and hurt and unconscious of whether or not he would be able to defeat his opponent. He was simply fighting with his total energy.

During that time I, being less involved and more objective-- it wasn't my brother; I was in no way responsible really for success of the Senator, but was inspired and awed by this unique group of people who were cohesively working together--periodically I gave thought to where we are now and what's going to be the result. I remember very well one day I walked into an office that was being occupied by [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien, who, as you know, subsequently went to the White House with the President and who had been close confidant of his for many years. Another lawyer, maybe a year or so older than I but virtually my age, by the name of [Richard] Dick Donahue from Massachusetts, who had been a longtime member of the Kennedy team, was also in Larry O'Brien's office. I said to Dick, "It doesn't look to me like it's going so well." He said, "Just wait until the candidate gets on the road. As soon as Jack Kennedy gets out on the road, taking his campaign to the American people, he will emerge." Dick Donahue seemed to have developed, over such a long period of time, such a profound faith in Jack Kennedy. Donahue had worked in his first campaign for the Congress and his campaign for the Senate and his campaign for reelection and now for the Presidency. It was a signal to me that the old timers really felt that as soon as the people saw Jack Kennedy--got the benefit of his charm and his ability, heard his speeches, saw his appearance--that he would come out ahead.

GEOGHEGAN: John, one of the big issues, of course, during the 1960 campaign was the religious issue. Would you care to comment about that.

HOOKER: Bill, I didn't really answer the previous question. I was going to talk about Jackie Kennedy and I want to do that in just a second but I also was leading up to the question of the religious issue. I say that I was neither fish nor fowl, and as fate would have it, I happen to be a Protestant. One night we were riding home and the vitriol about the Catholic issue was emerging. This, I would say, was

in early August. Bob said to me, "Will you take over the problems of accumulating everything that the Senator has said on the religious question and put together a consolidated statement relative to the religious issue and the Catholic question?" And I thought how unusual it was for me, a Protestant, who was probably the least qualified of so many people who were around to deal with the question for him to designate that I do this. I worked very diligently on that for, I guess, ten days, at the termination of which I had gone back through all the files and taken out virtually everything he had said on the question of religion and compiled it in sequence and then in transcript form and submitted it to Bob. He read it and we ran it as a paid political advertisement in the New York Times. It took about a complete page of the New York Times, ordinary type. I've got a copy in my files of that paid political advertisement in the New York Times which I compiled. It was, in effect, a reiteration of the Senator's position on the question of Catholicism and what effect, if any, that had upon the presidency of the United States. It has always been amusing to me that I performed that function in view of the fact that there were others who seemingly were a great deal ^{better} qualified than I was.

During that time I discussed with Ralph Dungan, who later went to the White House and who was a close adviser to the President and who had been formerly his legislative assistant while he was Senator, a great many things about the religious issue and what were the best answers. Ralph Dungan himself was a Catholic and a man deeply schooled in theology with a very profound grasp of Catholicism and at the same time a profound grasp of government. He helped me considerably in being able to put together these statements of Senator Kennedy and in writing the preamble to those statements which later became the political advertisement. It was not too long after that that he made his really strong statement in Houston in which he thoroughly clarified his position on the religious issue. During that time I remember I went to a meeting in the Mayflower Hotel in Washington and heard the various political factions headed by Billy Graham's father discuss the religious issue. There was obviously a great feeling among some theologians, especially the non-Catholic theologians, that the election of a Catholic president was a dangerous governmental decision. Of course, I feel, and I think the American people feel, that the thousand days of the Kennedy Administration show the inaccuracy of that

concept to begin with. I don't think President Kennedy's tenure as President of the United States was changed one hundredth of one per cent by the fact that he was a Catholic as opposed to an Episcopalian or a person of any other religion. But certainly during that period in August there was great agitation and there were meetings going on in downtown hotels in Washington of various religious groups who were raising this question in very alarmed terms. It fell my responsibility to prepare the material to be used in a paid political advertisement which ran not only in the New York Times but ran generally nationwide. Then subsequently, of course, there came the Houston speech in which he made his position crystal clear. As you know, as late as November that was still an issue. I think it is to his credit, however, that at the time of his death that issue had long since ceased to be a real worry on anybody's part.

GEOGHEGAN: Tell me, John, at anytime during the course of the campaign as the election day neared, did Bob Kennedy indicate his own opinion as to whether the President was going to win or not?

HOOKER: Yes, As I told you, about July or August or early September Bob seemed so totally involved with the struggle that I just got no feeling one way or another as to whether he anticipated victory or defeat. I simply got the feeling that he was involved in a total fight, a total effort to help his brother be elected President of the United States. Of course, the Bob Kennedy personality constantly was focused on victory, and I guess within the framework of his personality that if somebody asked me at that time what Bob thought, I would have spontaneously responded that he thought his brother was going to win. But certainly during July, August and early September it was from nothing he said. However, beginning in about the middle of October it became quite evident that Bob felt his brother was going to win and that he was hopeful that he was going to win by a sizeable majority.

I particularly remember one night driving out to his house in late October. There were three of us on the front seat of his car and he was driving. It was a convertible and it was an unseasonably warm night and he put the top down. We came to the Lincoln Monument and he looked up at the Lincoln Monument as we

were driving past, going across the bridge down towards McLean. He said, "You know, that's the greatest monument in Washington." From that we got to talking about Lincoln, what he had done for the country. Then he began to talk about what he thought his brother was going to do for the country. Shortly before we arrived at his house, I said, "Bob, are you really convinced that the Senator is going to win?" and he said, "There's no doubt about it in my mind. We're going to win."

GEOGHEGAN: What did he say about what the President was going to do for the country? Do you recall during that conversation?

HOOVER: He recognized that the President had formulated a program which was largely predicated on the idea of progress, upon the idea of not being handcuffed by the mores and prejudices and inadequacies and insecurities of the past. It was going to be the mission of the Kennedy Administration to make the heretofore impossible possible. I think that when he looked to Abraham Lincoln and thought of the Emancipation Proclamation, he thought of his brother as being the successor President of the United States who really would do something meaningful for the liberation of the Negro and the enhancement of the status of the Negro. I didn't--well, at that time--go into any particularity with him specifically, issue by issue. But the fact that this conversation came out of a visual recognition of the Lincoln Monument, and his remark about Lincoln and what he felt about Lincoln, I felt that Jack Kennedy was going to pass a civil rights bill that was meaningful and would, in effect, change the course of the last hundred years. Of course, while he didn't live long enough to pass it into reality, certainly he passed it in spirit. It was passed undoubtedly as a monument to him and in recognition of his feelings about it.

GEOGHEGAN: John, I would like to skip around a bit, if we could at this time, and ask you to discuss your involvement in May and June, I believe it was, in 1961 following the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion, the unsuccessful effort to obtain the release of the Cuban Brigade prisoners.

HOOKER: Bill, I went to Washington. I have to verify these dates. But I went to Washington on some occasion. I think it was the President's birthday. There was a dinner, and I went to go to the dinner and had left here on a Friday intending to return on the plane Monday morning. Saturday I went by the Attorney General's office to visit with him and my friend, John Seignethaler, from Nashville who was his administrative assistant. I was sitting there talking to John Seignethaler when Bob Kennedy walked out of his office and he said, "Hooker, would you do me a favor?" Jokingly to him I said, "Gee, haven't I done you enough favors? What do you want now?" He said, "We've got a real problem here about the tractors for the Cuban prisoners. We want to make this exchange if we can. The President feels very strongly about these boys who tried to liberate Cuba. I feel very strongly about it and I want you to help. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Walter Reuther and Milton Eisenhower are involved, as you know, as the three people who are heading a committee to effectuate the exchange of the tractors for the prisoners. But they need somebody to help them who can devote full time. Would you give me a few days?"

I said, "Bob, I really need to go back home. I didn't know you were going to ask me to do this. I really need to go back home."

He said, "This is an important thing for the country and for these boys and I wish you would do it. Would you just give me five or six days?"

And I said, "Sure."

Nine weeks later I was still involved in the tractors for the Cuban prisoners. I had never been back home in that nine-week period. I had been in Washington most of that time and had a long and arduous, laborious, tiring experience. The country as a whole, according to the Gallop poll, did not feel kindly towards the idea of the exchange of tractors for the prisoners and it was the subject of considerable debate on the floor of the Congress. There were accusations that participation of private individuals such as Mrs. Roosevelt and Walter Reuther and Milton Eisenhower and myself was a violation of the Logan Act in that private citizens are not supposed to engage in international affairs. This was in our view not an engagement in international affairs in that the deal to involve

the tractors was not superseding or interfering with the functions of the State Department, or CIA. But anyway that charge was being made. During that nine weeks, Bill, the Gallop poll came out and showed that 62 per cent of the American people opposed the exchange of the tractors for freedom. There was a great deal of vitriol and a great deal of animosity about, in effect, doing business with Castro.

I came to know, during that period, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt pretty well. I saw her on many occasions. I won't burden this conversation by telling you some of the anecdotes about my relationship with her and about the tractors for Cuban prisoners, but she was, to say the least, a fascinating human being and was dedicated to the exchange of the tractors for the Cuban prisoners, as was Walter Reuther. Milton Eisenhower was much less secure. He, I think, was almost from the moment of his involvement sorry that he had undertaken to be on the committee to raise this money. He expressed to me that he didn't think that this was helping Johns Hopkins. He thought it might be detrimental to his ability to raise money as the President of Johns Hopkins to be involved in the practice of the Cuban prisoners since it hadn't turned out to be a popular matter.

Milton Eisenhower got extremely irritated with me. There was a list of people who were leaders in the business community, civic community and labor community who had agreed to lend their names and efforts to the tractors for the prisoners' movement. That list of people was ultimately published in the newspapers. Milton Eisenhower claimed that he never authorized the publication of that list and accused me of having published that list in defiance of his orders. He accused me of insubordination and was, generally speaking, to put it mildly, infuriated with me. In his book, The Wine is Bitter, which came out about a year ago, he wrote what Milton Eisenhower described as "the most vitriolic letter that I ever wrote anybody," in which he expressed to President Kennedy his displeasure with me and his displeasure with the whole episode. Milton Eisenhower's book devotes many pages to the tractors for the Cuban prisoners and it is mainly a denunciation of me. While this matter was going on, however, Milton Eisenhower never told me face to face that he was irritated with me. He had his administrative assistant inquire as to the reason that these names were released. I explained to him and gave him

what I thought was a satisfactory explanation and a factual explanation. I thought I had convinced him this was, a good faith mistake. Apparently from Milton Eisenhower's book, it was not so regarded by Milton Eisenhower and he was "provoked," to use his own description to write the President of the United States "the most vitriolic letter I ever wrote anybody." According to Dr. Eisenhower's book, this was largely a denunciation of me personally.

I was in the Mayflower Hotel late one afternoon and the telephone rang. The operator asked if I was John Hooker, Jr., and I said, "Yes." And she said, "Would you hold the line for the President?" He came on the phone and greeted me and in his characteristic way. He always called me "Long John." And he said, "Well, Long John, how's it going?" and I said, "Well, Mr. President, we've got problems. I don't think Dr. Eisenhower is satisfied with his role in this matter. On the other hand, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt and Walter Reuther have been like a rock. The problem is whether or not we can ever get Castro to agree to anything that is reasonable. He keeps upping the size of the tractors and I don't know whether or not we are ever going to be able to agree on any type of tractor. Mr. Reuther and Mrs. Roosevelt both have reservations about giving him V-8 tractors which are, as you know, extremely large tractors and feel that it is not in keeping with what he requested in the beginning. He had requested agricultural type tractors, and now he keeps upping the size of the tractors. And, as you know, Mr. President, these larger tractors are more than just agricultural instruments. They are, in effect, small tanks."

He said, "Long John, I recognize this is a difficult matter. I feel very strongly about this, however. I want to liberate these prisoners. They are there out of a sense of love of freedom and liberty and they have made a great sacrifice and they have depended on me. I want to deliver my responsibility to them and the responsibility of this country to them. I hope that you will continue to work at this and do everything you can to work it out." And I said, "Yes, sir." He seemed so calm about this matter--calm in the sense that he didn't seem to be worried about the fact that the polls showed that it was unpopular. He didn't seem to be worried about any criticism. He was resolute and determined to do what he could to effectuate the liberation of these prisoners.

Of course, as you know, Bill, we were unsuccessful. We were never able to make the exchange of the tractors for the prisoners. Some years later the effort was undertaken again by a lawyer in New York named [James B.] Donovan and others, and there was an effective swap of medicine and drugs to Castro for these prisoners, and they were all ultimately liberated.

GEOGHEGAN: How was your venture finally terminated?

HOOKER: During the course of the nine weeks, I had two or three conversations with the President about it. and many conversations with Bob Kennedy about it. Bob Kennedy was very much interested in the exchange of the tractors for Cuban prisoners. As history shows, he had taken a prominent role in the deliberation relative to the Bay of Pigs. He had a strong conviction about our participation in the tractors.

The fact is that there were two or three episodes during the tractors for the Cuban prisoners that are marked deeply in my memory. We asked the State Department to provide us with an interpreter to go to Cuba with the agricultural experts who were going down there to discuss the size and type of tractor with Castro's agricultural experts. I took these agricultural professors to the airport along with their interpreter and put them on an airplane to go from Washington to Miami and then to Havana.

As I was walking up the steps at the airport, I got a page. It was a page from the Cuban Desk at the State Department. I went and answered the phone, and they informed me that the man who was the interpreter for the agricultural experts, who was on the airplane with them, was at least rumored to be a communist. Since the State Department had provided us with this interpreter and since we had relied totally upon them, we had made no check of the man. Since we had relied totally upon their judgment as to who to use as an interpreter, this naturally came as an alarming piece of information. It seemed a little ironic to me that you send him in with three men whose basic credentials were that they understood agricultural practices. So, I didn't really know what to do. There I was in possession of information that indicated we were sending a communist

interpreter with these three agricultural experts. It wasn't too late to stop the expedition in that the plane had just left Washington. They had to change planes in Miami before they went on to Cuba.

But, at the same time it seemed to be a moment of gravity and I didn't want to get involved in the red tape. So I called Bob Kennedy at home. He wasn't there. He was at the White House having dinner with the President. I called over there to the White House and said that I wanted to speak to the Attorney General, and they came back and said that he was having dinner with the President. I said to the person on the other end of the phone, "I understand that, but I have a problem. Would you pass him a note telling him I want to talk to him?" In a few minutes he came to the phone, and the first thing he said to me was--he always called me by my full name--the first thing he said was, "John Jay Hooker?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Don't you have sense enough not to interrupt me when I'm having dinner with the President of the United States?" I said, "Yes, Bob, I do but I've got a problem. Unfortunately, I've just put a man on the airplane to go to Cuba to interpret for our agriculturists who the State Department now informs me is a communist. To be quite frank, I don't know what to do about it. Since you are the brother of the President of the United States, I thought you might have some better idea as to how to handle this problem." With a little short pause he said, "I can see that is a problem. He said, "Have you talked to the FBI?" I said, "No." And he said, "Well, I would do that first. How much time do we have?" I explained to him about the flight to Miami and how long it would take them to get to Miami and so forth.

Well, to make a long story short we checked it out and finally after about four hours, twenty minutes before the plane was to leave Miami for Havana, the FBI finally concluded that, while this man had had associations with certain communists, he was not a security risk in their judgment. That was substantiated by the State Department, and it was decided to let this man go and continue on as the interpreter. He did continue on, and I was sure he was not a communist and that it amounted to nothing. It was simply a false alarm. But it was an interesting experience for me, who was basically a lawyer from Nashville, Tennessee, to walk up the steps and be paged by the

Cuban desk at the State Department and to be told there was a communist in my midst and that I ought to do something about it. I didn't really know what to do about it except to call Bob. He responded with cool calculation and he proceeded in an orderly course, and made a judgment within the next four hours. I think I had two or three conversations with Bob. I talked several times with Courtney Evans and others at the FBI, and finally we made a judgment that this man was not a security risk. And the negotiations took place in good form. He was not a communist.

Finally, at the end of nine weeks it became obvious that we were going to be unable to make an exchange with Castro. He did want 500 V-8 tractors, which are enormous instruments and they have got no more similarity to an agricultural tractor than a gold ball does to a basketball. They are so different in size and function that they are two different types of things. We were never able to make the exchange for that reason. We notified Castro that we were not going to be able to make the exchange. On the same day we notified him that we were not going to be able to make the exchange and that the committee of Mrs. Roosevelt, Walter Reuther and Milton Eisenhower were disbanding, he sent twelve Cuban prisoners to Key West to negotiate for their own liberty and I was notified that they were en route and to take what action I could. At that time Milton Eisenhower was in Bermuda, I couldn't get in touch with Walter Reuther or Mrs. Roosevelt, and I boarded an airplane and flew to Miami. I was then flown by the Immigration and Naturalization people in a little single-engine plane over to Key West. Beginning at about 11 o'clock at night, I met with these Cuban prisoners for about twelve hours in an effort to explain to them the dilemma we were in, to reassure them of the admiration of the President of the United States for them, his continuing interest in them and his determination through some means to ultimately liberate them.

On that occasion, because of the limited time, I had no opportunity to take an interpreter with me and I got there and they had the twelve of them who were there. There were two or three of them who spoke broken English. There had been enormous publicity given to their arrival in Miami. We were talking at this hotel. I think I said hotel but that's not accurate. Originally we were talking in some naval base. I would say there were hundreds of Cubans outside, or maybe within thirty

feet of where we were talking, who were the families of these twelve boys and were the families of other boys who were either still in prison or who were dead, and who wanted to talk to these twelve boys to find out the condition of their children. So we began there at 10 or 11 o'clock at night to talk and to try to exchange views and to learn thoroughly the positions of each other.

Unfortunately we were at loggerheads. There was nothing that we could do. We could not provide the type of tractors. I would like to tell one anecdote here with respect to that twelve-hour meeting, which really terminated in a remarkably friendly fashion. Because of the fact that these boys were prisoners and because of the fact that they were under extremely heavy pressure by Castro to effectuate this exchange and because of the fact, of course, that they, being human, wanted to be liberated themselves, I thought that they took with a good deal of grace, with a good deal of courage, the verdict that we could not send these V-8 tractor tanks. But during the twelve hours--they are, after all, Spanish-speaking people, warm-blooded people--and, as I say, we didn't have an interpreter and it was very difficult to communicate. After about 4:30 in the morning a Negro, the only Negro on the delegation, spoke up in Spanish and said that he wanted to talk to them and he made a two-or three-minute statement to them and then asked for an adjournment. Well, up until that time if one of the prisoners would start talking, all the prisoners would start talking and it was this sort of continuous noise. But I noticed that when this Negro spoke that great silence came into the room, which interested me very much because there were a couple of lawyers, a medical doctor, there were considerable people there of the twelve of wealth and education. When this Negro spoke they all listened, whereas they hadn't listened to the people you would have naturally--because of their education and accent so forth--it was naturally thought that they would have been the leaders.

So, we did have the adjournment, and during the adjournment I made some effort to find out who this Negro was. He was about 27 or 28 years old. I learned that he was a bus driver in Cuba, and that he had been in the Brigade, and he had been one of the ones who had been interviewed by Fidel Castro

on live television shortly after the Brigade and capture. Castro said to him on live television, "You know, I can understand how some of these other people have come over to overthrow me who did well under Batista, the landowners and capitalists who have been living off the Cuban people for many years and who are ruthless and money hungry. But I can't understand how you, a Negro who had no status under Batista, who never had any status in Cuba, would come over here to overthrow me, Fidel Castro, the liberator of the Cuban people." This Negro on live television in a room with Fidel Castro and with armed guards looked at the Premier and said, "It is because, Fidel, I am a human being first and a Negro second," at which point they excused this Negro and for the next three days he was supposed to be shot. It turned out that Castro didn't shoot him and he ultimately ended up in Key West as one of the twelve prisoners to effectuate the negotiation. But it showed not only the tremendous courage of this Negro and his perspective about the situation in Cuba, but there the attention of the other Cuban prisoners to him showed their respect for him and their understanding of his total commitment to the concept of freedom. So when this Negro, who was younger than most of the other prisoners and who had much less education, began to talk, they all listened. I would say more than any other, or certainly as much as any of the others--in fact, at the end they were all quite cooperative--but this one helped to effectuate an esprit de corps among his companions that enabled them to accept with grace and dignity the judgment that the exchange could not take place.

I subsequently told that story in much the same form to President Kennedy, and he said to me that he appreciated my efforts, he appreciated the efforts, of course, of all the people who worked on the tractors for the Cuban prisoners. He said to me, "Long John, some day we will get these boys out." Of course, the rest is history. He did get them out. He subsequently went to Miami and met the Brigade having, at the expense of personal criticism, to live with his promise to himself to liberate these valiant boys who had fought for freedom in this hemisphere. I think it was characteristic of the President that to him a commitment was never terminated until it had been fulfilled, that circumstances or intervening factors merely delayed his actions. I don't think for one minute that Jack Kennedy ever intended to abandon these warriors

who were at the Bay of Pigs, and I think he was willing to pay any political price, to accept and to field any criticism that the pundits or that public opinion brought out, in order to fulfill what he thought was the responsibility of the President of the United States to these boys who really cared enough about their liberty to lay it all on the line at the Bay of Pigs.

GEOGHEGAN: John, a while back when we were off the record, you mentioned that at the time of your visit to Hyannis Port, when you had dinner with President Kennedy and the rest of the family, there was some discussions about the problems relating to France, nuclear weapons and deGaulle. Would you care to comment about this?

HOOKER: Well, one of the weekends particularly, when the President was there for three or four days-- it may have been Thanksgiving--I was there through the entirety of his visit. As a matter of fact, I flew up on Air Force One with him and flew back with him. During that period of time I had occasion to see him for several hours--at least to be in the room with him and to talk with him and to hear others talk with him. I don't know whether I said this on the record in the interview earlier, but I remember him sitting there in his sport shirt with his shoes off, and his father coming in and he immediately jumping up and recognizing his father and paying him the respect that he felt for him, which I am sure he always felt for him. During that time we had a discussion. Jackie was present, Bobby was present, Ethel, the President, Mr. Joseph P. Kennedy and myself. We talked at some considerable length about Roosevelt and the Roosevelt years and we got on to the question of the present state of the world, particularly the problem of nuclear weapons and the fact that France wanted to participate as a nuclear power.

The President obviously was extremely thoughtful on this subject. The minute the conversation turned to that specific point, his relaxed countenance changed, his face indicated thoughtfulness. He sat up erect in the chair and looked concerned. He talked about General deGaulle and obviously had done an enormous amount of reading and/or had been briefed in detail about General deGaulle as a human being. He knew a great deal about his personality, about his character, about his part in the history of France. It was obvious that John F. Kennedy admired General deGaulle. It was obvious that this was the

views of a vital, young 43-year-old President of the United States. I did not feel that his father, who had been through the pressures of other generations and another era, was as impressed by General deGaulle as was the President. Not that Mr. Kennedy particularly indicated any animosity toward General deGaulle, but he had been the Ambassador to England and I think because of the posture of the French during the Second World War, that his younger son, a 43-year-old man, had.

GEOGHEGAN: Did the President say anything at this time which explained this admiration for deGaulle?

HOOVER: The President said that General DeGaulle had the faculty to lead. General DeGaulle had the faculty to visualize a goal and to set sail for it. And he, in effect, indicated to his father that this man's perseverance and personality were such that anything he said at the negotiation table had to be weighed within the framework of the fact that he had the facility to succeed, that he had the faculty to stand and fight and to labor against odds to win his point.

This was, I think, a different view, a different generation's view. Mr. Joseph Kennedy had seen France surrender; had seen France leading, then standing alone. John F. Kennedy, the President of the United States, had been involved in that but only as a very young man and as an instrument in the War. Now he regarded deGaulle as an important aspect of the free world, France as an important factor. He recognized that economically, in the world trade situation and in the posture of the free world, France was of extreme importance. I don't mean to indicate that he in any way belittled England. His father, who had been the Ambassador, despite his controversies with some of the English emanating from his relationship with them and his disagreements about the War, at previous times obviously had a great respect for the English. But John F. Kennedy realized that, despite the fact that deGaulle was many years older than he was, deGaulle still was a man to be reckoned with, and the problem of giving nuclear weapons to France, making available to them some of our resources, on the one hand, or on the alternative, not making it available to them, was a very difficult problem, and that it could not be put in an either/or

dichotomy. He talked about the percentage of communists in France and he talked about the problem that this raised. It was difficult to give this power to a government that has as high a percentage of citizens who were communists as does France and yet he realized that the government as headed by deGaulle was a great ally to this country and he wanted to preserve that. He wanted to further the identity of interest between France and America and he did not want to say no to deGaulle because he felt, in the main, a sense of mutuality of purpose with deGaulle and with France. He obviously was bothered by the dilemma that faced him, and faces us still to a large degree.

GEOGHEGAN: John, a while back I asked you to comment about the personality of Mrs. John Kennedy, Jackie Kennedy as she is known, and her relationship with the President. Did you observe it? I don't know whether you finished all you had to say on her.

HOOKER: No, I really didn't respond to that question in the interview earlier out of a sense of disorganization, being flooded with these memories.

When you turn your mind back to the memory of these people, you get so many different mental pictures, so many different emotions. But I'm glad you mention that again at this time because during this conversation about deGaulle, when they were sitting on the couch together, he reached over and held her hand in a spontaneous gesture. I remember the sentiment that I felt as I saw them--these two young people, one of whom was the President of the United States, having what was obviously a very normal and natural relationship as man and wife, as two young people. You know, it's difficult to imagine the President of the United States as anything but the President of the United States. It is difficult to imagine him as a father or as a husband or as a spectator at football games. At least I think it is for most of the American people. The office and the responsibility and the pomp and the circumstance attendant to being the President of the United States--it is not easy to visualize the President in human relationships feeling and acting as many of us feel and act. And yet every time I saw him I was impressed with how natural he was despite the great authority and responsibility and the power and prestige of the office. And she was so natural with him. I remember they

walked out of that room together in maybe an hour, an hour and a half. They walked out together holding hands and chatting. She obviously had great affection for him, admiration for him.

I think sometimes that the pundits and the people I have read who have written articles about the President and Jackie have missed the fact they had a great deal in common. Most people talk about or write about the dissimilarity of their worlds. He was a man who was interested in politics, government and hard intellectualization, butting heads with ideas. She was a person who was intrigued by the beauty of art and was not interested in the practical, pragmatic problems of life but was more interested in the aesthetic things of life. When somebody asked her how she liked the concerts she had at the White House, she is supposed to have said, "The things he likes about it best is that when he comes into the room, they play 'Hail to the Chief.'" And she may have said that in poking fun at him, but they had a great deal in common. He was more a part of her world and she was more a part of his world than I think has been evidenced by anything I have read. There was a deeper conviviality between those two people, at least it appeared that way to me, an outsider, an observer whose main relationship was a relationship with the brother. But just being there with them gave me a feeling that there was a spirit of understanding between them that ran very deep. They both had great admiration for one other.

I remember during the campaign. . . . I had a variety of jobs, none of which were of great significance and none really planned out in advance. But all turned out to be interesting. Working on the religious issue, I guess, in a way was important. It was certainly interesting. I spent a good deal of time in preparation of material on that. One night we were riding home and Bob said, "You know, maybe Jackie ought to have a press conference. Why don't you call and ask her if she wants to campaign a little?" I said to him, "Gee, Bob, that's a little presumptuous of me. I don't really know Jackie that well. Why don't you call her?" So he said he would and he called her, and a couple days later he said to me, "If she's willing to do it, you give her a buzz." So I called her up and said, "How are you getting along?" And she said, "Fine." She said, "I understand you want me to have a press conference. Bob talked to me about it. I would be delighted to do it. When do you want to do it?" I said, "Well, what about doing it on Friday?" And she said, "That's fine. As a matter of fact, I'm going to

New York on Friday. (She was at that time in Hyannis Port). Maybe we could do it in Boston in transit from Hyannis Port to New York." I said, "Great." She said, "What do you want me to talk about, or what can I really talk about?" And I said, "Well, you are going to have a baby and maybe let's talk about that." And she said, "Oh, good. Let's get some other people involved in it." So I said, "Fine, I'll let you know."

I had another chat with Bob about it and he said, "Why don't you get Dr. Good who delivered all of my mother's children, including me and the President. He's now in his mid 80's. Why don't you get Dr. Good to participate in the press conference. And there's a nurse who's been with us for a long time and who was in the operating room many times with the Kennedy children, the Kennedy grandchildren. Have an interview with Jackie and Dr. Good, who, as I say, is in his mid 80's, and the nurse." I said, "Fine." And I called Jackie back and she said she would be perfectly willing to do that. I got in touch with Dr. Good and with the nurse. I called all the press from NBC, ABC, and CBS, the wire services and various newspapers and arranged for them to meet with Jackie and the other people at the airport in Boston. I told them where we would meet. I got to the airport in Boston about 7 o'clock that morning and went to the room that had been designated. I personally set up the chairs and did all the leg work for the interview. Then about fifteen minutes before the interview was to take place, I met Dr. Good and the nurse and went out to the place where the private planes land and met Jackie, who was coming in from Hyannis Port. I took her and went back into the airport and walked into the room where the press conference was to take place. And to my utter consternation, embarrassment, and mortification there wasn't a single, solitary person from the press there. And there I stood with the wife of the Democratic nominee, who everybody had wanted to interview, and with this 85-year-old doctor, this nurse. I had somehow been a part of a mixup. She took a look at the room and turned and smiled at me and she said, "Maybe the press didn't want to see me as bad as you and Bob thought they did." I explained to her that that couldn't be. I was sure they would be there in a minute. So she said, "Well, let's sit down and talk. We sat down on the couch and spent the next 45 minutes talking. Finally it came time for her plane to

go to New York. It became obvious that nobody was going to show up. I took her out and put her on the airplane and she went to New York. During that 45 minutes she was relaxed and gracious. She made every effort to keep me from being embarrassed. It was a delightful 45 minutes.

I put her on the airplane and said goodby to the doctor and the nurse and was walking back from the gate where I put her on the airplane and turned in the opposite direction, walking out to catch a cab, and ran into seventy-five newspapermen. I realized that they had gone to the wrong room. It so happened that the manager of the airport the preceding day had given me definite instructions as to what room to go to, and I had told them to go to that room. But the room that they were in was the room that was ordinarily used and they had simply gone to the place that was ordinarily used, instead of to the room that had been designated. In the transmission, I guess, from their editors, or the people I had talked to at the news media, to the reporter, it had gotten lost as to just exactly where it was. I remember shaking hands with one of them and said that I was John Hooker, Jr., and I had been there to help hold a press conference for Mrs. Kennedy. One reporter spoke up--it must have been ten or twelve feet away--and in this loud voice said, "Well, where in the hell have you been?" I said, "Well, look, I don't want to be offensive about this, but 45 minutes ago when I was sitting in this room with Mrs. Kennedy waiting for you all, I wondered where in the hell you were." And all of us had something of a laugh. She never had the interview.

Shortly after she got back from India where she had been so fabulously received by the press, by the people--everywhere she went she was surrounded by crowds and news media who wanted to talk to her and just get even a glimpse of her--when she got back to this country I sent her a telegram and said to her how proud I was of her great performance in India and abroad and in other countries. She sent me word about two weeks later through Ethel, "You tell Hooker I said I would like to have him back as my press agent." By this time she was being so overcome with requests to appear in public that everywhere she went she was surrounded. What she wanted was some fellow who would give her a few moments of reprieve and she had remembered that experience that I had had. She was a person of such good cheer about it at the time, she turned it into a bond of friendship

between us instead of an impediment to my relationship with her.

I have great admiration for her. I saw her not too long ago as state chairman for the Tennessee Kennedy Library Drive and I always look forward to seeing her. I remember one time in December of 1960 when I went to Georgetown to talk to the President-elect. I had a short visit with him. We sat in the kitchen of his house in Georgetown. He thanked me for having worked in the campaign and said he wished I would come to work for the Administration. I told him I could not, that I needed to return to Nashville and get about the business of making a living practicing law. He said he understood that. As we sat down in the kitchen I said to him, "Mr. President, you know I have always had a kind of a crush on Jackie." With that broad grin of his he said, "Well, she doesn't have one on you." I said, "Well, how do you know?" He said, "I just know." I said, "Mr. President, I don't know why the President of the United States has to deflate a fellow's ego to that degree." And he looked at me and he said, "I'm saying that to you for the same reason you would have said that to me if I had claimed that about your wife."

He put his arm on my shoulder and we walked out and down the corridor and out to the front hall. He said, "Let me have my picture taken with you." We stepped out on the porch and there were a myriad of photographers, probably 300 newsmen standing out side his front door, and he stood there and shook hands and smiled and said, "Long John, thanks," and turned around and walked back in the house. As I started down the steps I recognized that there were some people who thought--it had been learned while I was inside that I was a lawyer from Nashville, Tennessee--there was a reporter there who thought that I might be the Attorney General, the next Attorney General of the United States or the Deputy Attorney General of the United States. He had talked to Adlai Stevenson and Estes Kefauver and Byron White on that same morning and, of course, he had a formal appointment with each of them and discussed the forthcoming Administration. My appointment with him was less formal and consisted of a ten-minute chat in the kitchen. Of course, he had no idea of making me the Attorney General of the United States but the mere fact that I was there, the warmth of his manner, there were some people there who thought, despite the fact that I was a little young looking, that since I was a lawyer, I was going to be the Attorney General. Bob and I have laughed about that a lot of times, how he got my

job. And that's the kind of man he was. He was most friendly and most appreciative and he delighted in seeing other people get recognition and other people be happy. He would go out of his way to facilitate that.

GEOGHEGAN: Did you ever have an opportunity to observe the President with his children?

HOOKER: Yes, Bill, on one of the visits to Hyannis Port I had several hours . . . We were playing touch football in the yard. He was sitting there in his golf cart. He played not only with Caroline--John-John was then too young--but he played with all of his nephews and nieces. He knew each by name and had a special relationship with each one of them. People to him, like to his father, were never just a part of a group. People to John F. Kennedy were individuals, and that included children. Whether he was playing with little Bobby or Joe or Kathleen, or Courtney, some of Bob Kennedy's children, or whether he was playing with Sargent Shriver's children or Eunice's children or Pat and Peter Lawford's children, he did so with gayety. He would hide things from them behind his back and let them climb all over him. Many of them called him Jack, and he obviously got a great deal of relaxation and a great deal of pleasure out of seeing them. They obviously got a great deal of pleasure out of seeing him and it couldn't have been just because he was President of the United States because most of them were too young to realize the significance of that. But his arrival on the weekend was a great occasion for them all. The helicopter would set down. Some of them would want to play in the helicopter; some of them would do the things that children would do at the exciting moment when somebody comes out of the sky and sets down right in the backyard. But it wouldn't be long until they were all quickly interested in playing with him. They would leave the helicopter and golf cart and return to him to play. That's the kind of magnetism and the kind of relationship he had for them.

GEOGHEGAN: John, I would like to, before we conclude this interview, turn to the sad events of the President's death. Would you tell me where you were at the time you heard the news the President had been shot and what your involvement was in the events of the ensuing three or four

days?

HOOKER: Bill, we are sitting here now in my law office in Nashville, Tennessee, and I was sitting in the same chair that I am sitting in right this minute. And the telephone rang and I was in the midst of a conversation with my brother, who is my law partner. We were discussing a matter of interest to us. It was another law partner of mine on the other end of the phone and he said, "John Jay, the President's been shot and he may be dead." I have a television set and heard the news. This was before, it must have been maybe ten minutes after the event, before the network really organized. You were just getting flashes of news. The commentator hadn't taken over his assignment with the type of coverage that took place beginning a few minutes later, and so there was this announcement on television that he had been shot, but then they returned to some program for maybe two or three minutes. Then the network came on. I was listening to NBC and I think Frank McGee came on with the beginning of the details of the fact that he had been shot. I would say within fifteen minutes there were fifteen people in my office, secretaries of the lawyers, people who happened to know that I had a television set, and we sat here until I just didn't feel I could stay here any longer--and still no word. But despite the fact that there was no confirmation of his death, the minute I heard that he had been shot I knew he was dead. I don't think it then really occurred to me, from the minute my partner said to me he had been shot and may be dead, I don't think it ever occurred to me that he was not dead. The fact that he was shot, the suddenness of it, was so compelling I didn't even think. . . . I had felt so involved with him, I had admired him so greatly. He had introduced me to new horizons, to new ways of thinking, to new ideas, to new concepts of what man should do. I don't think, in retrospect, that at that moment I could allow myself the luxury of hoping that he wasn't dead for fear of the disappointment five minutes later. The shock was so terrific. I remember putting my hands on both sides of the chair and holding on as if something was going to quiver and give way, in an effort to steel myself from the fact that my idol, in a way--I guess that is the only way to describe it, had been killed. Actually before the final confirmation came, I said to my brother, I motioned to him in this room that

was full of a lot of people, and we in silence walked out of the building and got in the car and turned on the radio and started driving. Then finally the word came that he was dead. And I remember tears rolling down my cheeks. Then I remember just crying openly and my brother the same way. We rode around for about an hour and a half, listless and unable to talk to one another. You had a thousand thoughts and it would labor this interview long past endurance. . . .

The next few hours it was a question of just feeling numb. And I remember when I got home about 5:30 and seeing my wife and the expression on her face. My little daughter, who was three years old at the time, she knew that the President had been shot. My wife's eyes--obviously she had been crying. I stayed up and watched the news. My wife finally, at about 12 o'clock, said that she felt so bad that she thought she would go to bed. I said, "Fine. I'll be up in a few minutes. I sat in the library for a couple of hours, alone, thinking about him and what he had meant, the struggle that he had made, the pain that he had suffered, his complete determination to make the most of himself for the benefit of other people as well as for the benefit of himself. And I thought about Bob and about his mother, about his father being ill.

Finally as the numbness wore off and the reality of the event began to come back into focus and the consciousness that the nation still stood, that this wasn't the end of the country, I began to think about the country and the fact that this wasn't the end of the country, that he would want more than anything else for the people who had been "his"--to use the vernacular of the Kennedys--"his pals," to respond with faith to the country. I remember the last thought I had before I went to bed was that the cold ground would never be so cold again once he was in it. This great human being had made a real difference in my life. I wouldn't be--and I didn't think a lot of people would be--as afraid to die knowing that he had done it, and was in the ground too. I went to bed and woke up the next morning and, of course, did nothing but watch television and tried to decide whether to go to Washington.

I finally did decide to go to Washington to the funeral. Then on the night of the funeral I went out to Bob's house and he and Ethel and the children were there. It was about 7 o'clock and we all knelt down in the middle of the floor in

the den and he said the prayers and sent them off to bed. We sat there in silence for maybe twenty or thirty minutes and watched the tapes of the funeral. I don't think I'll ever forget the expression on Bob's face as he watched that. In a few minutes he picked up the phone and called Maxwell Taylor and said, "I just want you to know that the President had a special place in his heart for you." They had a short conversation and he hung up. We began to talk again about the unbelievability of the whole thing and Bob said there were certain parts of it he couldn't remember. He couldn't remember Air Force One, the President's plane, flying over the grave at Arlington. He just had no memory of that. He said that apropos of the fact that there was some mention of that made on television as we were sitting there listening. And then he reached over and picked up the telephone again and said to the White House operator, "You know, my brother always told me that one of the worst things about leaving the White House would be leaving the White House telephone operator. But I guess where he has gone now, he doesn't need telephones." And so in this moment of absolute deprivation and despair--it is hard for me to even partially convey what Bob Kennedy felt and showed on his face, or how he felt. He alluded to afterlife in the same sort of casual manner that he did the first time I ever saw him when he said that his brother Joe had gone to heaven. And there is no doubt in my mind that Robert Francis Kennedy thinks that John Fitzgerald Kennedy is in heaven today.

GEOGHEGAN: Thank you very much, John.