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Name DON HEWITT

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Signature [Handwritten Signature]

Date 6/09/03

Signed: [Handwritten Signature]  
JOHN W. CARLIN, Archivist of the United States

Date: 7-16-03

DON HEWITT

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Oral History Interview

with

DON HEWITT

October 8, 2002  
New York, NY

By Vicki Daitch

For the John F. Kennedy Library

DAITCH: I appreciate your taking a few minutes to prepare for it. I'm just going to set up the tape by saying that my name is Vicki Daitch. I'm speaking with Don Hewitt. And it is the 8th of October.

HEWITT: It's the 8th of October, Tuesday.

DAITCH: Right. You were about to tell me how you met Kennedy.

HEWITT: The first time I ever met Jack Kennedy it was, I think, two weeks before the first Nixon [Richard M. Nixon]-Kennedy debate, which actually was never a debate. That was a misnomer. It was a confrontation and a joint news conference, but nobody ever debated. How that word came to be, I don't know. We met in a hangar at Midway Airport. He was campaigning in the Midwest. He diverted his plane to Midway, which is a small airport, not O'Hare, downtown Chicago. We met in a hangar. My recollection is I think that Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] was with him, but I don't recall that that much. It's a lot of years ago. And he was curious, you know, where do I stand? Do I stand? Do I sit? How much time do I have to answer? Can he interrupt? Can I interrupt? He wanted to know everything. Nixon I never saw until he arrived that night in the studio. Kennedy knew how important this television appearance would be. Nixon kissed it off as just another campaign

appearance.

He arrived in the studio that night. He looked like death warmed over. He'd had a staphylococcus infection. He banged his knee on the car door getting out. He walked in, he looked pretty bad. I was standing there talking to him, and all of a sudden I noticed out of the corner of my eye Jack Kennedy sort of arrived. And it was awesome. Here was this guy running for president of the United States who looked like a matinee idol. Well tailored, well tanned, in command of himself, command of the language. I guess I'd never seen a matinee idol president before. As we stood there, and I kept telling what each one was going to do, I felt like a referee at a fight, like I was giving them a last-minute "Give me a good clean fight!" etc., etc.

DAITCH: Right.

HEWITT: And then I said to both of them, "Would you like some makeup?" I had with me a lady named Frannie Arvold [Frances Arvold], who was the best makeup person I knew, and I brought her to Chicago. I said, "Would you like some makeup?" Kennedy, who didn't need any, said, "No, thank you, not really." Nixon, who needed makeup, also said no, I'm convinced, because he didn't want history to record that that night he was made up and Kennedy wasn't. So they took him back in a room, in an office. And the guys that are with him, his handlers, made him up....

DAITCH: Each one had their individual office?

HEWITT: There were individual offices. One had probably the president of WBBM and one had the vice president. And they made them up with something called "Shavestick," which is a... And badly, he looked awful. When he came out, I looked at them both on camera. Kennedy looked great. Nixon looked terrible. So I called Frank Stanton [Frank N. Stanton] into the control room, who was then president of CBS, and I said, "Frank, you better look at this." He took one look, and he called in a guy named Ted Rogers [Edward S. Rogers], who was Nixon's television advisor. And he said, "Are you satisfied the way your candidate looks?" And he said, "Yeah, we think he looks great."

So Stanton took me out in the hall and said, "It's none of our business. That's the way they want...." Ted Rogers! Ted Rogers was his campaign television advisor. Leonard Reinsch [J. Leonard Reinsch], who owned stations in the South, was Kennedy's television advisor. And we put them on that night, and that's all anybody remembers about that night is makeup. I mean there are scholars who always say to me, "Well, wait a minute. That was an important night. I mean what about Quemoy and Matsu?" And I said, "Okay. Who said what, and where are Quemoy and Matsu?" And we never heard of them again. It was completely irrelevant. I'll get back to the makeup in a moment.

That night was a great night for Jack Kennedy, and the worst night that ever happened in American politics. That's the night the politicians looked at us and said, "That's the only way to campaign." And television looked at them and said, "They're a bottomless pit of advertising dollars." From that day on nobody has ever run for office in the United States without amassing a war chest to buy television time, and it all winged off that

night.

It cost Franklin Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] \$2.2 million to get elected president. In today's money that 26, 27, 28 million dollars. Hillary Clinton [Hillary Rodham Clinton] and Rick Lazio [Enrico A. Lazio] spent twice that on television commercials for one Senate seat. That night the democratic process became hostage to money. I don't think before that night anybody had ever heard the term fund-raiser. Every time a president leaves the Oval Office, it's for a fund-raiser. The fund-raiser is to get money for television time. The only way to get money for television time is to do favors for people who give you money.

As I told John McCain [John Sidney McCain III], it's got nothing to do with campaign reform. It's got to do with bribery. Guys are being bribed. And the only reason politicians need money--the only reason we have this terrible condition in American business with the Tycos and the WorldComs is because they've had politicians in the palm of their hand because they give them the money to buy television time. And it happened on a night that we're all very proud of. But when I look back on it, a terrible happening.

DAITCH: Stanton told me.... I spoke with Mr. Stanton a few days ago.

HEWITT: Yes.

DAITCH: He's a wonderful man. But he still seems to consider that one of his proudest accomplishments. And if it had been debates more than appearances, more than advertising for the candidate, it seems to be a good idea, public debates.

HEWITT: Teddy White [Theodore H. White], who wrote *The Making of the President*, Teddy and I once went to the League of Women Voters with a proposal, that it be a real debate and each candidate bring a debating team. You know, they'd get guys from their party who really knew how to debate, and you debate the proposition: Propose that Jack Kennedy be the next president of the United States, pro and con. You do it before a joint session of Congress. The first one hour is a debate. And the second hour is Democrats in Congress firing questions at the Republicans, and the Republicans in Congress firing questions at the Democrats.

Get the newsmen out of it. I know more about these debates than anyone because I did the first one. I'm telling you there's not one news guy who ever was in a debate, and there was never a debate, that doesn't say to himself, "What can I say that's going to make me look smart without making me look partisan?" That's crazy. Debates are partisan. They shouldn't be nonpartisans in a debate. Debates are all about partisan issues. And you put news guys in there who try not to be nonpartisan, and you get nothing. They're like two guys waltzing around trying to make sense of--some guy and a bunch of news people trying to promote themselves.

If that were the only appearance, or several debates, without having to buy commercial time, I think it's a very worthwhile and marvelous thing that Frank Stanton devised. But what winged off it was paid television appearances. And I don't know

whether I'm voting for a candidate or a copywriter. I have no idea who's saying those things to me. So that's how I feel about debates and that night.

I also left there thinking, we just elected a president, when the debate was over. Because he [Kennedy] was better tailored, better looking, more articulate. I said, "That's not how you want to elect a president, by his performance in a debate." Now, I think we got the right man but for the wrong reason. I'm not sure that's how you should pick your president. That's how you pick Miss America, who is the more attractive? That's not the way to pick a president, who's the more attractive of the two people? But it happened in that case. We got the more attractive guy, and he happened to be the better guy, and he made a pretty damned good president.

Now, about the makeup. It wasn't 'til almost 40 years later that I learned from Ted Sorensen that they also made up Kennedy that night. I never knew that.

DAITCH: Really!

HEWITT: He said we put some powder on him. I said, "Well, whatever you did, you did it better than the Nixon people did." That's the first time I ever knew about it. Because I'd been going around for years telling this story of the no makeup, and it wasn't true.

Let me tell you a couple of other wonderful stories that wing off that night. Frannie Arvold, the woman I brought out there to make them both up, after the Kennedy assassination, we did a special broadcast. Nixon appeared on it. I was sitting in the room with Nixon when Frannie Arvold was making him up for his appearance. And I said, "You know, Mr. Nixon, if you'd let Frannie make you up the night of that first debate, you might have been president now." Without a beat, he said, "Yeah, or I might be dead now, too." I mean it was chilling. Because Nixon thought that whoever did it was out to get a president, not that president.

The next time Frannie was making him up, we were in San Francisco. He was about to go out on the rostrum at the Republican Convention to introduce Barry Goldwater [Barry M. Goldwater], the nominee. And I said to him again, I said, "You know, Mr. Nixon, if you'd let Frannie make you up in the Nixon-Kennedy Debate, Barry Goldwater would be going out there now to introduce you." He looked at himself in the mirror for around ten seconds, and he turned around very slowly, and he said, "You're probably right."

One other makeup story. I can't prove this, but I've always assumed that I'm responsible for the Nixon houses in San Clemente and Key Biscayne. Because I once said to him, "You know, if you'd had a tan the way Kennedy did, you wouldn't have needed makeup." And I think that's why he bought those two houses. Okay. What else? So much for the debates.

DAITCH: They make good stories. Tell me a little bit more. Before we leave the debates, you had met Nixon before; you had not....

HEWITT: No, I never met Richard Nixon.

DAITCH: Oh, okay. So that was the first time you met both of the candidates.

HEWITT: First time I ever met him. No, I met Kennedy two weeks before in a hangar at Midway.

DAITCH: Now, you said that Nixon wasn't interested in preparations. Did you contact both candidates and invite them?

HEWITT: Yes, yeah. I tried to get them, and they weren't interested. And Nixon that afternoon.... Kennedy rested that afternoon and got ready for this thing, and I guess he boned up with Sorensen and the rest of the staff. Nixon had made a speech either to the Plumbers or the Carpenters, I forget which, as if I have one appearance this afternoon, and I've got another one tonight, and one's just like the other. So that he never really took it as seriously or never realized what the impact would be, as I assume Kennedy did. If Kennedy didn't, at least the people around Kennedy did.

DAITCH: Did you...? I mean obviously Mr. Stanton believed that it was very important. Did you and the other people?

HEWITT: Oh, yes. It was a milestone in American politics. But as I say, in retrospect, it was a terrible night because it's the night that television and politics fell in love with each other, got engaged and then got married, and the world's never been the same since. The other thing I remember, right after it was over, I called him back. I said, "There's a call for you backstage." It was a pay phone backstage. How the guy got that number, I don't know. It was his father who called to tell him how good it was.

DAITCH: Oh. Was it actually--is "live" the right word? Was it broadcast live?

HEWITT: Yes, it was live. There was no tape delay.

DAITCH: Oh, okay. I'm not sure I knew that it was live.

HEWITT: Yes. It was live right there in front of God and everybody.

DAITCH: Oh, okay. And so his father called right after that.

HEWITT: His father called right afterwards.

DAITCH: So what were your impressions of Kennedy and Nixon as.... I mean you were a young man at the time, too. You're following politics. You're thinking one of these guys is going to be president.

HEWITT: You know, I wasn't a big Richard Nixon fan. I don't know very many people who were. Kennedy was different. Nobody had ever had an Ivy League president before. He was like Central Casting. I mean if you're going to--he could have played on *West Wing*, he looked the part. Actually, he didn't look the part. He looked like a different kind of president. You know, the guys who looked the part are the guys like, you know Teddy Roosevelt [Theodore Roosevelt], Franklin Roosevelt.

He brought something to that job that people my age identified with. It was sort of a class act. And I didn't see him again for some time. The next time I saw him, Walter Cronkite [Walter L. Cronkite, Jr.] and I went up to Hyannis on the first of a half-hour news broadcast to talk to him about Vietnam. We had a big fight with Pierre Salinger because he said something two different ways. We liked one way, and Salinger liked the other, and I said, "We're using that." And Salinger said, "If you don't use the other way, we're going to put it out." And I said, "That's violation of everything we've always believed in, and you don't put out the outtakes of our story." So we had a big fight.

DAITCH: You mean he was going to put it out like make it public?

HEWITT: He did, he put it out to the press. And I said, "You can't do that, Pierre." But he did it anyway.

DAITCH: What was the thing that...? Do you remember what the thing was that...?

HEWITT: It had to do with a warning to the South Vietnamese to either shape up or ship out, you know. If you don't shape up and clean up your act, we're going to cut loose from you. Vietnam was a bad chapter. I mean everybody always.... It's funny. These wisemen who were around Kennedy, the Rusks [D. Dean Rusk] and the Rostows [Walt Whitman Rostow] and the McNamaras [Robert S. McNamara], these guys led us into the Mekong Delta. I mean it's.... And the blame for the thing always went to Lyndon Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] and Richard Nixon. They didn't get us in there. In fact, we were doing....

Lyndon Johnson, Mike Wallace [Myron L. "Mike" Wallace], and I were down at the Johnson Library, and we got talking about Vietnam. He said, "You know, World War I was Woodrow Wilson's war, World War II was Franklin Roosevelt's war, Korea was Truman's [Harry S. Truman] war. Then when Vietnam came along, you guys called it McNamara's war, but it was really Jack Kennedy's war." And I mean that's a big mouthful out of Lyndon Johnson.

Another great Lyndon Johnson story, if you're interested....

DAITCH: Absolutely.

HEWITT: We were in Los Angeles at the convention that nominated Kennedy. And it's the day that we all learned that Kennedy had twisted Lyndon Johnson's arm enough to get him to be his running mate. We're in the lobby of the Biltmore Hotel, and there's this big to-do, and Lucy Johnson [Lucy Johnson



Nugent] is missing. Nobody can find her. Secret Service is looking all over for her. And finally they bring her into the hotel; they found her. I remember the scene in the elevator going up in the Biltmore. He said to Lucy, Lyndon said, "Where in the hell were you?" And she said, "I went to Disney World." And he said.... Or was it Disney Land? Whichever one is in Anaheim. "I Went to Disney Land." And he said, "We didn't come to California for you to go to Disney Land." And she said, "Yeah? We didn't come to California for you to be vice president either." [LAUGHTER] Saucy, snotty kid! I thought he was going to reach out and whack her in the elevator. Isn't that a great line?

DAITCH: Oh, yes! That's classic. Oh, my God!

HEWITT: But I figured that's the kind of stuff that'll give salt and pepper to what you're doing.

DAITCH: Yes. That's wonderful! What a great story!

HEWITT: Yes.

DAITCH: Oh, my gosh! Did the people at the Johnson Library know that one? Have you told them that one?

HEWITT: I don't even remember whether I told them that or not.

DAITCH: That's beautiful. Oh, my gosh! In fact, I'm talking to Lynda tomorrow, Lynda Robb. I'll have to ask her about that.

HEWITT: Ask her. Tell her I remember the night that Lucy was missing, and she shot back at her father, "We didn't come here for you to be vice president either."

DAITCH: Wow!

HEWITT: Snotty kid!

DAITCH: Oh, yes. So what was his...? I mean obviously he wanted to be the presidential nominee.

HEWITT: Of course. He came to California to get nominated and found out he was the vice president.

DAITCH: Did you see any...? I mean you were in the elevator with them. Is that the only contact you had with him at that time?

HEWITT: I didn't know Lyndon Johnson. I knew him later on from time down at the ranch. Scare the hell out of you. Big, blustery. I always remember him hollering at Lady Bird [Claudia "Lady Bird" Taylor Johnson], "Bird!!!" he was kind of difficult. Also about his predecessor.... We were doing a three network conversation that I was producing and directing with Kennedy, and we were all on a Sunday morning in the Oval Office. And protecting everything so nobody knocked into any furniture, and we put drop cloths down on the floor. And when he arrived--he'd gone to church--and he came in the Oval office to see what was going on. "We're being very careful, Mr. President. Don't worry. We put drop cloths down to protect the floor."

He said, "You don't have to protect the floor." And he went over, he pulled a drop cloth out back, and the floor was all chewed up. He said. "You see what the sonofabitch did with his golf cleats?" Well, the minute I knew golf cleats, I knew it was Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]. He said, "You know, the sonofabitch, he used to wear his golf cleats in his office. And he'd go out to the Rose Garden to practice putting, and he chewed up the floor." Now this is a great moment: "Look what the sonofabitch did with his golf cleats."

DAITCH: He really cared about stuff like that, didn't he?

HEWITT: Oh, yes. You know, he thought it was sacrilegious to do anything to the floor in the Oval Office. I guess I mentioned that I once said to Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy].... Did I tell you this already?

DAITCH: You did, but the tape wasn't on at that time.

HEWITT: Okay. We're sitting up at Hickory Hill. It's a Saturday morning. We were drinking iced tea in the backyard.

DAITCH: What were you doing there?

HEWITT: I was going to use Bobby on a television show we were doing called Town Meeting of the World. And why I said it, I don't know, but I looked at him, I said, "Do you believe that Lee Harvey Oswald, all by himself, killed your brother?" And he said, "What difference does it make? It won't bring him back?" For reasons I never understood, none of those guys, Salinger, Bobby, Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell], Dave Powers [Dave F. Powers], Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] would never, ever talk about the assassination. Did they know something?

And then, I'll tell you on tape, I was sitting in Howard Baker's [Howard H. Baker, Jr.] office. Howard Baker probably was as good a Republican senator who ever sat in the United State Senate, solid citizen. He said to me--I think I told him that story. He said, "You know, I once said to Richard Nixon, "What do you know about the Kennedy assassination?" And he said to me, "You don't want to know." That frosted me.

I think about that a lot. I think about that, and I think about the fact that when the Warren Commission had its last meeting, Earl Warren said, publicly on the steps of the

Congress where they were meeting--I'm pretty sure that's where they were meeting. I don't think it was the Supreme Court--he was coming out, and he said, "We may never know the truth in our lifetime." And I keep thinking, what did he mean by that?

DAITCH: Right. After just spending all that time searching for....

HEWITT: That's exactly right. I don't.... I'm not a conspiracy buff. I've always believed that there was a rogue CIA operation somewhere in the Everglades who were going to get even for the fact that Jack Kennedy had denied their comrades air cover during the Bay of Pigs, and a lot of them were killed on those beaches. And I think a lot of those rogue CIA guys who were part of that were determined to get even.

A couple of things I kind of know for a fact that most people don't seem to know. Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby [Jack L. Ruby] were not strangers. Lee Harvey Oswald knew Jack Ruby, and Jack Ruby knew Lee Harvey Oswald. Lee Harvey Oswald had either a distant cousin or an uncle who was also a gang member, who was an associate of Jack Ruby's, who, as far as I know, told Jack Ruby, "Take care of my kid, my nephew." I think somebody sent Jack Ruby there to shoot Oswald before he could talk. I don't believe that he went there to kill some guy who killed his president. I don't believe that for a moment.

Now, who did all that? I don't know. And people say, well, this many years after, somebody would've talked by now. I don't believe that. I don't know who, but maybe they're all dead by now. But anyway, the Nixon "You don't want to know" chilled me. And I talked to Sorensen about it once. This is as close as Ted ever came to talking about it. I'm going to read you exactly what I said in my book that he said.

I asked him if I could paraphrase what he told me, and he said, "Read me what you want to say." I read it to him, and he said, "That's fine." And it's quoted. "While it would surprise him to learn that Oswald had accomplices, it would not dismay him should it someday surface that Oswald had accomplices, because it would lend some badly needed rhyme and reason to an act of insanity that up to now has had neither." And Ted said, "You can say that. It's a pretty good paraphrase of what I told you." So that was with his permission. But that's the only time I've ever had anybody in the Kennedy camp ever even comment about that day.

DAITCH: It's amazing, considering how long ago it was and how passionately they all must have felt about that.

HEWITT: Isn't it? There's something that they don't want to talk about. Now, did Bobby and Teddy have a plan to get rid of Castro [Fidel Castro]? I don't know. I don't know. There are those who will tell you that's what it was all about. I don't know it, but they never would talk about it. To this date they won't talk about it. You've got nothing in that library from either Salinger, Sorensen, O'Donnell, Steve Smith, or Dave Powers about what they think happened that day. They won't talk about it. They say it's too painful. I say, "No, it's too painful not to talk about it."

DAITCH: You wonder about that.

HEWITT: You wonder about it. Is this the kind of stuff you want?

DAITCH: This is absolutely wonderful, yes.

HEWITT: Okay. All right. Okay.

DAITCH: Tell me a little bit about some of the interactions that you had with Kennedy. You have some beautiful pictures here. I love this picture on the bottom with you sort of crouched next to him.

HEWITT: That's when we did the three network thing, and that's the time he said to me, "Look what the sonofabitch did to the floor here with his golf cleats." Yeah, he was a good guy. You know, a lot of gossip, most of it true. I was married to my ex-wife who was one of the women.

DAITCH: Really?

HEWITT: Oh, yes. I know that story very well.

DAITCH: No kidding!

HEWITT: Oh, yes. She tells a great story about one night Jackie [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis] was in Palm Beach. And she went to the White House to have dinner with the president and Kenny O'Donnell and Pierre and Dave Powers, you know, the guys. They all had too much to drink, and they were needling her. She said, "I have no idea why I did this." She said, "I had about as much needling as I could take, and I stood up at the table, I looked at the president of the United States, and I said, 'You can take your White house and shove it. Get my coat. I'm getting out of here.' He said, 'Oh, Frankie [Frances L. Childers Hewitt], for Christsake, sit down. Stop acting like a damn fool.' She said, 'I can't stand this place. Every time I come here, I always think Abraham Lincoln's going to jump out at me from behind a curtain somewhere.' And he said, 'Will you just sit down and finish your dinner?' 'No, I'm getting out.'" She grabbed her coat, and she left.

She woke up the next morning hung over and she said to herself, oh, my God, what did I do last night? How many people have a close personal relationship with the president of the United States and blow it? So she said about five o'clock she got up enough nerve to call Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln]. And Evelyn said to her, "Where are you?" She said, "What do you mean, where am I?" She said, "He thinks you're mad at him." [LAUGHTER] She said, "Thank God!" She said, "Come over here." So she said she went over; it was around five o'clock. She walked into Evelyn's office, and Evelyn said, "Go on in, he's in there alone. Go in and see him." And she was very clever. She had a great line. She walked in, and she said to him, "I'm willing to be forgiven." [LAUGHTER]

DAITCH: That's great.

HEWITT: Isn't that great? So, you know.... And then I remember my stepdaughter was a little kid, she must have been about six years old, when Frankie took her to the Oval Office. And she said, "Mr. President, this is my daughter, Jill." And he said, "Oh, I've met Jill before." And this little kid says, "No, you haven't." And he said, "Don't tell me! Of course we've met before." And this little kid said, "No, sir, you haven't." And he said, "Well, of course I have." And this six-year-old looked up at him and said, "You meet a lot of little girls. I only meet one president. I would remember." Isn't that great. [LAUGHTER]

DAITCH: It is. Oh, my gosh!

HEWITT: Those are all the human touches.

DAITCH: Yes, that's wonderful. You're talking about, if you don't mind my asking....

HEWITT: No, please.

DAITCH: This relationship with Frankie and other people, this seems to be pretty open. I mean he's got women in the White House.

HEWITT: Oh, yes. Are you kidding? Judith Exner [Judith Campbell Exner].... Now, Tina Sinatra told me, and then she said it on our air, that Joe Kennedy [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] called her father, and said, "We need help in West Virginia. We've got to get the labor vote because it's going to Hubert Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]." And Frank Sinatra [Francis A. Sinatra] went to Sam Giancana [Samuel M. Giancana] and The Mob and got the votes that won West Virginia. I think also Illinois, but I know West Virginia.

DAITCH: Through the Mine Workers' Union?

HEWITT: I don't know, but some union in West Virginia, which was Kennedy's first big triumph when he beat Hubert Humphrey. Several years later, when Bobby started going after The Mob, Sam Giancana called Sinatra and said, "We made that sonofabitch president. What is he doing to us? Sinatra, according to Tina, said to The Mob, "Your fight's with me, not them. If you're unhappy, I'm the guy that was the go-between. What do you want?"

Sinatra played 13 dates with the Rat Pack with Sammy Davis [Sammy Davis, Jr.] and that whole crowd, Dean Martin, at a club called the Villa Venice in Chicago for nothing, 13 dates, to pay back The Mob for their being had by Bobby. This is Tina Sinatra telling me this. Then Sinatra went before the Gaming Commission in Nevada to get a license to operate a gambling casino at Cal-Neva Lodge, and he was asked about these 13 dates he

played for The Mob in Chicago.

DAITCH: So people knew about that.

HEWITT: And he said it never happened. Tina said to me, “He lied. He told me he lied.” So there was.... That’s the whole Judith Exner, Sam Giancana, Frank Sinatra. It was a side of Jack Kennedy that was indiscreet. I mean as far as.... It’s like Bill Clinton [William J. Clinton]. I think it was more cerebral than sexual. I mean he didn’t know that a young kid was going to brag about having it off with the president. Jack Kennedy didn’t realize.... Well, most of the women who had things with Jack Kennedy were very secret about it. Judith Exner wasn’t. It’s almost irresistible to say you’re having an affair with the president.

So it was reckless. You don’t do that. It’s like with Bill Clinton, it was reckless. I’ve always figured that Hillary went on about that the Right Wing was using this to get him. I said, “You know, if you consider yourself a firewall between Sane America and the crazy Right Wing, you’d better take better care of that firewall.” You can’t do that. You can’t have a thing with an intern in the Oval Office. You can’t invite the top mobster in America’s girlfriend to spend the night with you in the White House.

So, you know, he was very human, but it wasn’t very smart. And it’s hubris. It’s no one tells the Kennedy what they can do and can’t do. Not good.

DAITCH: No. And maybe not just the Kennedys. I mean if there’s something about that position or power, because a huge percentage of our presidents have had....

HEWITT: Yes, sure. But the girlfriend of a top gangster in America, especially when that guy had helped him win, bad stuff. One other story with my ex-wife. We were doing, I was doing a thing on Rose Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] once up in Massachusetts, Boston. And Rose knew that my wife and Jack Kennedy had been good friends, more than good friends. And I was looking for baby pictures. So she called Frankie, and she said, “Go up to the house in Hyannis Port. Tell the caretaker that I told you to come up here. Go up in the attic.” Up in the attic were these incredible pictures. You probably have them. Him on his kiddy car. All the baby pictures were up there in the attic. That’s where she found them. It was an incredible thing.

DAITCH: Wow! And she just told Frankie to go up there.

HEWITT: She said, “Go up there. They’re all in the attic.” And Frankie came back and called me, and she said, “You’re not going to believe what I found up there.” So we used them for the first time in that broadcast. I don’t know what else to tell you. I hope you’re getting some stuff you can use.

DAITCH: I'm getting some wonderful stuff. Absolutely. And I appreciate it. I'm letting you talk because you tell great stories, and that's what this is all about really is stories. I mean you know as well as I do that memory is fallible.

HEWITT: Yes.

DAITCH: And so these things are to get the stories that you remember.

HEWITT: I remember all these stories.

DAITCH: I've watched Kennedy, or course. I mean he was assassinated when I was young, and so I don't have a real recollection of him. But I've watched the videotapes, and he's incredibly charismatic.

HEWITT: Oh, my God, yes! Oh, sure. Absolutely. You know, as I was saying, he was Central Casting. If you were going to do *West Wing* in those days, you would say, "Hey, would you want to play this part?" I was going to tell you one other.... Oh, yes. After he became president, my Ex [Frankie Childers], when I first met her, was USIA at the UN. She said, "I know why I was there. I was there to keep an eye on Adlai [Adlai E. Stevenson], on what Stevenson was doing."

So she said, "I went back to have dinner with him once, and he said, "Frankie, what kind of a job do you think Adlai's doing?" "What are you asking me for? He's your ambassador for Christsake." And he said, "I wouldn't have asked you if I didn't want to know." She said, "Did you ever look at that delegation you've got at the UN? It's a bunch of old ladies in men's pants." And a great Jack Kennedy line: He said, "You know, come to think of it, Marietta Tree's [Marietta Endicott Peabody Tree] the only man on the delegation." [LAUGHTER] A great Jack Kennedy line.

DAITCH: Yes. Beautiful. He was full of those, wasn't he?

HEWITT: Oh, yes. Yes. He was quick. He had a command of the language. He was a scholar. He was kind of every American mother's dream of the guy they want to marry their daughter, and it was tough to argue that. When you go back to what he really accomplished before he was assassinated, there's not that much there. Lyndon Johnson really got civil rights through. I'm not sure that Kennedy would have had as easy a time getting civil rights legislation through the South as Lyndon Johnson did. Lyndon Johnson pulled out every stop. Oh, he threatened, cajoled, bribed. God knows what else he did. But he got it. And I think there were a lot of Southern congressmen who may have resented Kennedy, whereas Lyndon was one of them. I think that's how we got civil rights legislation.

DAITCH: Tell me what you remember about civil rights and the Kennedy administration.

HEWITT: I always believed that Bobby had a greater interest in civil rights legislation than his brother did. I always felt that Bobby was very real. I don't know. If Bobby cried, Bobby meant it. So I'm not sure that without Lyndon Johnson they ever would have gotten that through. Not that I'm a big Johnson fan, but he did do that. And I'm not sure Kennedy could have.

DAITCH: Kennedy was a cautious politician, too. Is that what was going on with the civil rights thing?

HEWITT: I don't think he had the muscle with Southern congressmen and Southern senators to get that through Congress, where Lyndon did. And if you read Bob Caro's [Robert A. Caro] book on Lyndon, pretty damned quick you find that there was more there than any of us realized. He was not a nice man. Kennedy was a nice man. His father wasn't.

DAITCH: He could afford to be in some ways.

HEWITT: Yes. Sure. Absolutely. What else? I think his daughter, Caroline [Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg], is a class act. I don't know what else to tell you.

DAITCH: You said something in your book about the media coverage when John Jr. [John F. Kennedy, Jr.]....

HEWITT: I went over there because Caroline lives near me. I said, "You guys should be ashamed. What are you doing camped out?" That was that the most overblown coverage of any one event. You know, a very nice kid whose father was president died. God didn't die that day. But they carried on like it was, you know, the worst thing that ever happened. It was an unfortunate thing. It was probably reckless. The plane shouldn't have been up there. But to camp out at Caroline's house.

And I saw her, I guess, it was earlier this summer. She said, "You know, I never ever got to thank you for that, what happened there." She knew about it, but she wasn't there. I left a note for her with the cop who was outside which they put on the kitchen table. I think she's moving out of there. I think she's going to move up to [Inaudible]. She doesn't want to live in [Inaudible] anymore. I see her around and about. What else? What else do you want to know?

DAITCH: Tell me about the Hyannis Port interview with Walter Cronkite. I watched some video footage, and it was.... I don't know what I expected, you know, looking at John Kennedy and the master, Walter Cronkite, and they were a little nervous. Both of them looked like they were kind of tapping their fingers and fidgeting a little bit.



HEWITT: Yes, yes. That's right, that's right. He was sort of awed by Walter, Walter was sort of awed by him. I don't think it produced a helluva lot. It really wasn't the milestone that every.... It didn't really reveal that much about either one of them. I think he had once before been on *Person to Person* with Ed Morrow [Edward R. Morrow] when he was running. I think that is around; I can get a tape of that.

DAITCH: Oh, really!

HEWITT: Yes. And I guess the kids were very young then. Caroline and John-John. You know, I've been in this business way over half a century. I mean I was at D-Day as a correspondent in 1944. This is 2002. I've been around forever. The one most poignant picture I ever saw in my life was John-John saluting the casket. That is maybe the one most poignant.... The one before that was the Frenchman crying as the Nazis were marching through Paris. But I was never touched by any picture as much as that one.

And when they talk about certain events, you know, when do they come to a close, like September 11th, they said, "There was no close." The Kennedy assassination had a last act. The last act was the horse with no rider prancing on Pennsylvania Avenue, and the little kid saluting his father's casket. And that was [chopping sound]--and the curtain came down. That ended a very traumatic experience, but there was no hangover afterward. It ended with that. And there was no end to like September 11th. What is the defining moment? When will that ever be over? Because there was no last act. This had a last act. This had a conclusion. I'm talked out.

DAITCH: Almost maybe.

HEWITT: All right.

DAITCH: The tour of the White House, did you have any...?

HEWITT: No, it was a guy named Frank Schaffner [Franklin J. Schaffner] who produced and directed that with Jackie because he had that little girl's voice. "And this is a desk, and this is so-and-so." He was from Virginia. The guy that produced it turned out to go to Hollywood and become a great name out there. He did *Patton* and *Nicholas and Alexandria*. He was great, Frank Schaffner.

DAITCH: Did you have any events or any communications with Jackie?

HEWITT: No, except that I gave the first William F. Daley lecture at the Museum of Broadcasting and Jackie was there. And I was so flattered. [CHANGE TO SIDE 2 OF TAPE 1] But I never knew her. I don't remember ever.... The only time I.... You know, there's a great story. The night of the opening of Lincoln Center, Lenny Bernstein [Leonard Bernstein] was conducting, and she was the guest of honor. During the intermission, she went down to see him in his dressing room, and

there were guards keeping everybody out. I was trying to get a microphone and a camera in there, and the guards wouldn't let us in.

I remember saying to the cameraman, "Yusef, get the goddamned camera in there. How can you not...? If you have to hit the guard over the head, get in there. This is a very important moment. I want to see him and her, and I want to hear what they're saying to each other." And he's saying, "They won't let me in here!" I said, "Goddamn it! Find a way in there!" I was really chewing him out. The next morning the review of that broadcast was somebody said that I had the good taste not to eavesdrop on their conversation. [LAUGHTER] This was one of my great moments.

DAITCH: That reminds me of--I think you told this in your book as well--about Dan Rather [Dan I. Rather] trying to get the Zapruder [Abraham Zapruder] tape. Tell me about what happened there.

HEWITT: Dan called me, and he said, there's a guy named Zapruder who's got actual videotapes of the assassination, but he's only going to sell it for millions to somebody. I said, "Dan, go tell him you want to see it. When he hands it to you, haul off and hit him, grab the tape, bring it to our station, copy it. Then return the tape. All they can get you for is assault because you haven't stolen anything because you've given it back." And he said, "Great idea! I'll do it." Then I said, "Oh, my God! What did I do?" So I called him back, and I said, "Don't do that!" Thank God he hadn't left yet. He would've done it. And I said, "Dan! Dan, don't do that. Don't do that. It's the stupidest thing I ever said to anybody." But when you realize.... What I thought was that what Zapruder had belonged to the world, and I didn't.... What he actually did is he finally sold it to *Life* magazine. And I said, "It shouldn't be sold to anybody. It belongs to the American people. Thank God we didn't do it. But I would've done it. I was crazy when I was younger.

DAITCH: Apparently he was, too.

HEWITT: Yes. You know, I did things when I was younger that if somebody said them today, I'd fire them.

DAITCH: [LAUGHTER] That's how you get where you are.

HEWITT: Yes.

DAITCH: I know that you probably need to get going. If you don't mind, can I ask you a couple more questions?

HEWITT: Sure.

DAITCH: Dr. Stanton told me a couple of things about the debates, and one of them was Nixon. Nixon was wearing a light-colored suit, and Kennedy was wearing a darker-colored suit. And again, he said this was just bad

judgment on the part of Nixon's people because it was in black and white.

HEWITT: See, they never would talk to us beforehand. I would've told him. They would have shown me, you know.... I don't remember, but I think Kennedy talked about what kind of clothes should I wear that night and stuff? I never saw Nixon.

DAITCH: Right. Another thing that--and I thought this was a cute little anecdote, but you can do backup for me on this in case it was a mixup. But Mr. Stanton told me that for one of the debates, Kennedy had on a pair of socks that were little short socks. So that when he crossed his legs, that the skin showed between his pants and his socks. So he sent somebody down there to tell him this is not good on television. And so he was going to suggest that they go up to the hotel and get another pair of socks. But instead they just did a quick and dirty exchange between one of his assistants and Kennedy.

HEWITT: I don't remember that.

DAITCH: You don't?

HEWITT: No. I'm not saying it didn't happen. I just don't remember it.

DAITCH: I just thought it was funny. And again, it's one of those things where you're trying to help the candidate's appear professional and all of that.

HEWITT: Sure. Right.

DAITCH: You said that they weren't really debates. And having watched them....

HEWITT: They weren't debates. They were joint news conferences.

DAITCH: Was there any point where you felt like, maybe even off camera, where you felt like there was actually any debate or conversation as opposed to just rhetoric?

HEWITT: They were answering questions put by reporters, which is not a debate. Debate has a definition. The Oxford Debating Society debates. But it's a good word. It's a shorthand for what they do. I don't remember anything that night rising above the level of the ordinary.

DAITCH: Were any of the other debates of any particular interest?

HEWITT: I don't think so.

DAITCH: No?

HEWITT: I've got to tell you: I look back on debates, what they call them. The first one was about Nixon's makeup. One of them was about Ronald Reagan [Ronald W. Reagan] saying to Jimmy Carter [James E. Carter], "There you go again." One of them was about Michael Dukakis [Michael S. Dukakis] being asked what he would do if his wife got raped. One of them was about Jerry Ford's [Gerald R. Ford] gaff about Poland not being behind the Iron Curtain. And Al Gore [Albert A. Gore, Jr.] and Bush [George W. Bush] was about absolutely nothing, and nobody can remember one thing either one of them ever said.

So the debates are.... I'll go back to what they produced. They produced this awful marriage of television and politics which is about money. And when a guy like Mitch McConnell [Addison Mitchell McConnell, Jr.] says, "You cannot deny anyone the right to buy as much television time as he wants because that's a violation of the First Amendment," The Founding Fathers would turn over in their graves if they heard that. What First Amendment and television time? They didn't know what television was.

DAITCH: Right.

HEWITT: You've got to realize that they lived in a time when you communicated through pamphlets. That's how Tom Paine [Thomas Paine] communicated with the world, pamphleteers. See, I believe, this is a little off track, but I believe that my people, journalists, have an exaggerated sense of their own importance, have an exaggerated sense of what the First Amendment gives us permission to do.

Those guys never heard about hidden cameras and debates that reached the world and satellites that send word around the world. They didn't know anything about that. So we have interpreted the First Amendment to give us rights that I don't think those guys ever even contemplated. That's a little off the beaten path of what debates do. But I really think that debate comes from a terrible chapter in American history.

DAITCH: It wouldn't have had to, right? Because wasn't the intent of the debates to offer free time? It was at the expense of the networks.

HEWITT: Nobody bought time before that. Nobody ever heard.... Now all of a sudden these guys are saying, "Jesus! We can buy time on every local station in America. They'll sell us the time to do what we did there." They knew that night that the only way you can get elected president of the United States was to be an appealing television performer. Therefore, they would buy the time to appear on stage as a television pol [politician].

Before that the only thing that ever happened was Dwight Eisenhower had hired Robert Montgomery, the actor, to help him, and the Young & Rubicam, the advertising agency, to do some television commercials. Up to that point, nobody ever even heard of it. No, it was an awful day.

DAITCH: So you think that not just Eisenhower being the precedent for that, but the fact that the debates really did make such a difference in the election?

HEWITT: They realized, hey, this is how you get elected. So if they're going to give us three free shots at it, let's go buy ourselves a couple of dozen more. Now how do you get the money to buy a couple of dozen more? You put the arm on people who want favors.

DAITCH: Right.

HEWITT: I don't think it could ever happen, but I think it should be made illegal to give money to a campaign if you do business with the government. But I mean they all do. They get money from aerospace companies that do business with the government and communications companies who are buying access.

DAITCH: Absolutely.

HEWITT: Do you know that since the first debate, and it almost started with that, there must be ten times more lobbyists on Capital Hill than legislators. What do you think they're doing up there? They're selling television time to these guys. It ain't good. Some day I'm going to sit down and talk to Frank Stanton about what we wrought that night. I don't think Frank realizes, but before that night, when presidents left the Oval Office, they went on important ventures. Now, since that night, when they leave the Oval Office, they go to fund-raisers. Every time Clinton came to New York, it was for a fund-raiser. George Bush has raised more money than anybody ever has in the Republican party to buy television time, which nobody ever heard of until that night of the so-called first debate. Now I'm throwing cold water all on your whole idea of this great first debate, but somebody's going to have to do it.

DAITCH: Yes. It's an interesting concept. I would have never connected.... I mean obviously we all know that there's this money for access going on in politics....

HEWITT: It began that night.

DAITCH: Yes. What's the money for? We know it's to win elections. But how do you win elections? That's the next step.

HEWITT: You win elections.... I mean I have a very close friend, Felix Rohatyn, who was ambassador to Paris. Felix could have been a senator from New York. But he said, "You mean I'd have to spend the rest of my life raising money, and having dinner with people I wouldn't want to meet in a restaurant, let alone in my home?" It's all about the money. It's not a good state of affairs.

DAITCH: No.

HEWITT: Television, of all the things television has done, bad things, that may be the worst. It made it impossible to run for office in the United States unless you have access to money. Now I have no problem with the Michael Blumbergs [Michael R. Bloomberg] who's mayor of New York and used his own money. I have no problem with Jon Corzine [Jon S. Corzine, Senator from New Jersey] using his wealth to become elected. I've got a big problem with guys who sell the office, that get elected because they want to use him. You know and I know nobody gives money unless they want something in return. Now sometimes it's a good cause, you know. I give money to that guy because he's interested in the elderly, and I've got a mother and a father who are in a home somewhere. But everybody has something he or she wants.

DAITCH: That's right. So if you're a chemical company, what you want may not be in the best interest....

HEWITT: You're Bernie Schwartz [Bernard L. Schwartz] and you're in the communications business. You're putting satellites in China, and they're helping you do it. Not good.

DAITCH: I wanted to ask you, we are supposed to talk with Mr. Cronkite this spring with any luck. I'll be very interested in what his recollections are of his interactions with Kennedy. Can you think of anything in particular that I ought to ask him about? You probably know as much about his interactions with Kennedy as anybody.

HEWITT: Yes. No, I wouldn't presume to tell you what Walter would want to say or not want to say. When you can tap that mind and get something, you'll get some gold. But you will.

DAITCH: I really hope so. I'm very excited about it.

HEWITT: You will.

DAITCH: Same question for Dan Rather. I know that he covered the assassination in Dallas. I mean that's sort of the beginning and end of his association with Kennedy.

HEWITT: Right. I mean he came to Washington to become the senior White House correspondent because he was a Texan and knew Lyndon Johnson. But he was never even in Washington before that. So he never knew Jack Kennedy.

DAITCH: Well, I think it's worth hearing his story on that. Is there anything else that you can think of that you want, anything about some of the photographs?

HEWITT: No, I think that kind of does it.

DAITCH: They're wonderful photographs. Well, thank you so much.

HEWITT: I used one of them on the cover of my book.

DAITCH: Oh, that's a wonderful....

HEWITT: Because it's so television, the camera and the lights and the boom.

DAITCH: It absolutely is. I have that on a list of questions that I was going to ask you about, that picture, if there was any special story about it.

HEWITT: There is to me. It's just that it says "television in those days." Anyway, I'm going to go to work. And if you need anything else, call me.

DAITCH: I will. Thank you very, very much. I appreciate your time.

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