

John Kelso Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 09/06/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: John Kelso
Interviewer: John F. Stewart
Date of Interview: September 6, 1967
Place of Interview: Washington D.C.
Length: 44 pages

Biographical Note

John Kelso was a reporter for *The Boston Post* who travelled with John F. Kennedy's [JFK] 1960 presidential campaign. This interview focuses on the 1960 campaign, coverage of JFK during his time as senator, and JFK's relationship with the press, among other topics.

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Suggested Citation

John Kelso, recorded interview by John F. Stewart, September 6, 1967, (page number),
John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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John Kelso– JFK #1

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	First meeting with John F. Kennedy [JFK]
2	<i>The Boston Post's</i> support of JFK during 1952 Congressional campaign
4	Atmosphere of JFK's office as a congressman
5	Impressions of Ted Sorensen
6	Effects of <i>The Boston Post's</i> worsening opinion of JFK
8	JFK's views on Senator Joseph McCarthy
9	Appointment of Scott McLeod as ambassador to Ireland
11	Relationship between JFK and Senator Leverett Saltonstall
12	JFK's reputation as a senator
14	Closing of <i>The Boston Post</i>
16	Becoming aware that JFK was going to run for president in 1960
18	Coverage of JFK's campaign
19	Impressions of Pierre Salinger, the press secretary
21	Competition between White House reporters
23	First time seeing Jacqueline Kennedy
24	Coverage of Senator McCarthy
26	JFK's absence during the McCarthy vote
28	Coverage of the 1960 Democratic National Convention
30	JFK campaign's press plane
32	JFK's public speaking techniques
34	Reporters' weariness on campaign trail
36	Election night, 1960
37	Party for the press
38	Robert F. Kennedy's role in the campaign
40	JFK's treatment of reporters
43	JFK's cabinet appointments
44	Reactions to JFK's assassination in Australia

Oral History Interview

with

JOHN KELSO

September 6, 1967
Washington, D.C.

By John F. Stewart
Also present: Mrs. John Kelso

For the John F. Kennedy Library

- STEWART: When did you first meet John Kennedy? Do you remember approximately?
- KELSO: It was approximately in the late 1940's in Boston. I really didn't get to know him well until he was elected to the Senate.
- STEWART: You didn't cover his '46 campaign for Congress or the '48 or '50?
- KELSO: No.
- STEWART: Were you writing political stuff then?
- KELSO: No, I was writing feature stories for the Boston Post then. My recollection is that I first met John Kennedy during a parade in Boston.
- STEWART: Bunker Hill Day?
- KELSO: It could be. Yes, some such event.

STEWART: This was after he had been elected Senator?

KELSO: No. It was about the time he was running for the House.

STEWART: Oh. Did you cover the 1952 campaign then or were you . . .

KELSO: No, I didn't cover his Senate campaign. I covered the national campaign. I went first to the Republican Convention in Chicago and then to the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Then I covered the Adlai E. Stevenson campaign in '52. And to my surprise, the Post, which was an independent Democratic paper, endorsed Dwight D. Eisenhower.

STEWART: They endorsed Kennedy also.

KELSO: They did. They sure did.

STEWART: Do you have any inside dope on why they supported Kennedy?

KELSO: No, I don't. John Griffin, who was the editor of the Post at the time and a man that I greatly admired, I assume had a big hand in making the decision. And that would be good enough for me despite all other reports.

STEWART: The story about the loan and . . .

KELSO: Oh, yes. I would not be privy to that.

STEWART: Do you remember anything about the Stevenson campaign that relates at all to Kennedy? Did that go into Massachusetts?

KELSO: Not that I had any part in, no. I think in those days, in 1952, it was always my impression that John Kennedy admired Stevenson's style, at least. It was his first fling on the national political stage; he was a literate man; he could talk well. And those things would appeal to Kennedy very much.

STEWART: So you came to Washington shortly after John Kennedy came?

KELSO: Yes, as a Senator. I began covering him very closely for the Boston Post. His office was almost a second office of mine. [Timothy J., Jr.] Ted Reardon was there as his administrative assistant; Evelyn Lincoln was there as his secretary; [Theodore C.] Ted Sorensen checked in some months later, quite a few months later; then Lee White. The others I never did see around the Senator's office.

STEWART: There was another fellow there for a brief time, Langdon Marvin, Did you know him at all?

KELSO: I knew him slightly, yes.

STEWART: Whatever happened to him?

KELSO: I don't know. It's my recollection across the years that he was featured prominently once in Life magazine. He was a big Harvard man. He had an office over in the Library of Congress.

STEWART: He was working on some airplane subsidies.

KELSO: Yes. But I never saw him in the Senator's office. I used to see him in the Senate dining room, around the Senate press table, say, in that area. But I can't remember ever seeing him any more than several others.

STEWART: Were you, as I understand, the first full-time person the Post had down here.

KELSO: Well, after a lapse of a few years. After Robert L. Norton died, who was quite a gentleman in all respects, the Post did not have a man in Washington until I came here. Bob Norton came well prepared. Few men, in my time, ever did come better prepared than Norton. He carried a stick. He read a lot. He was a member of the

Gridiron Club. When he tossed names around, he really meant it. Like when he said, "Bernard Baruch," there was no kidding. He knew him well.

STEWART: Do you recall anything about the atmosphere of President Kennedy's office when he first came in '53? Was it generally a very informal place?

KELSO: Yes, it was. It was very informal. And from the outset, I can see now, in retrospect, he tried very hard. He wasn't married then. The Saturday Evening Post, I think, ran a piece, and they got caught really, entitled "The Senate's Gay Young Bachelor." Three or four weeks later he'd married. He read a lot. As I recall, there was a big fish on his office wall that he caught at Acapulco. Reardon and I went into his office one day. He wasn't there. And we spotted a couple of golf balls and clubs. We were chipping golf balls under the divan. He walked in. He was not amused.

I remember his first big speech in the Senate on trying to get business into Massachusetts. He was a back-bench senator. He got up about 5 o'clock in the afternoon; there were two or three people in the gallery; and he went through it for an hour or so. I think Seymour Harris of Harvard helped him on that one.

STEWART: He gave a series. His first few speeches were a series on the economic problems of New England.

KELSO: Right. That's it.

STEWART: Ted Sorensen, in his book, points out that the President faced a real crisis in 1953 because he had been a fairly inattentive congressman and not too serious, enjoyed social life and so forth. But when he came to the Senate, he faced a real crisis in terms of settling down. Did you see any of this change? Or from talking to people, were you aware that there was a change?

KELSO: No. As I look back, the change was almost imperceptible. He was growing older every year. A young man, but as he passed from his twenties

into his thirties, he just changed. I couldn't see that he talked any differently or dressed any differently or acted any differently. He was in the Senate. That was a bigger deal than the House. He had defeated a big name in Massachusetts, Henry Cabot Lodge. But I don't know how Ted really would know, Ted Sorensen. He wasn't there when he was in the House.

STEWART: I guess he came in '53. I don't know exactly what month.

KELSO: Sure. I remember when he came. He was a very fine fellow, he still is. I think one of his first big jobs of importance, for the then Senator Kennedy, was to route books from the Library of Congress down to him when he had that back operation and wrote his book, Profiles in Courage. Ted had a small office.

Ted worked very hard in the campaign. I don't want to get out of sequence here, but I can remember one night in Florida. It comes back to me that I saw him and Richard N. Dick Goodwin, whom I saw for the first time in my life. They both came to a hotel room door in their undershirts at 1 or so, and they were writing some sort of press release. And only four or five of us stayed. And they finished at 3 or 4 in the morning. From a newspaper point of view, it wasn't so hot. I bring it up only to note that they were dog tired and dirty, and they were writing in their underwear in a little Florida hotel room late at night. Sorensen was a worker, in the White House, every place. He could sleep on the divan all night long and so forth.

STEWART: I've heard all kinds of stories about the friction, real or supposed, that existed between him and Ted Reardon. Were you aware of this at the beginning in '53 or '54?

KELSO: No. I wasn't, because in the Senate Ted Reardon was the dominant figure, in my opinion, in the Kennedy office. I never saw Pierre Salinger or Lawrence F. Larry O'Brien or Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in Senator Kennedy's office. Now I'm not saying they were never

there. But I was there every day, sometimes two and three times a day. Ted Reardon ran the office. That's all there is to it. Now, I'm sure the Senator had outside help and so forth, but I did not see it. And Ted Sorensen did not exert the outward influence in the Senate that he did later in the White House.

STEWART: The Boston Post as we said had supported John Kennedy in '52 and then within the next three or four years really soured on him. Just how did this affect your role as a reporter for the Post down here?

KELSO: He didn't like it. There's no question that he could be sensitive to criticism, as far as I was concerned at least. The Post ran a cartoon that was on page one that was very unfavorable to him when he voted for the St. Lawrence Seaway. The Post thought that the Seaway would hurt New England. Kennedy called up in connection with that cartoon and a story I had written, which I thought was a straight news story . . .

STEWART: Relating to the Seaway?

KELSO: Yes. It's my recollection. But my point is that he was going full blast when I said, "Hello." Another time, at a press conference I asked him a question, and he cut me right off at the knees. Now those were the only two times he ever blew up at me. But after the press conference, on a Saturday, he called me into his office at the White House and explained it to me, which I will never forget, of course.

STEWART: This press conference was at . . .

KELSO: When he was President, yes.

STEWART: What was the question?

KELSO: Oh, it was something to do with U-2 flights. Oh, it was dangerous, it was sensitive, but I thought it was newsy, and I asked him. And

I can remember [Charles W.] Chuck Roberts of Newsweek, when the press conference was over, asking me how it felt to be cut off at the knees coast to coast. The following Saturday morning, [P. Kenneth] Ken O'Donnell approached me in the White House lobby and said, "Come with me." And I went in, and President Kennedy was all smiles and very affable and explained to me why he was abrupt the previous day.

STEWART: And what was the reason? That it was sensitive?

KELSO: He said it was a very sensitive question, and he said, "Besides, Lodge covered it at the U.N." At the time Henry Cabot Lodge was the U.S. representative at the U.N.

STEWART: Getting back to the early 1950's, the big cause, of course, of the Post's disillusionment was [Joseph R.] McCarthy. How did this affect your relationship with then Senator Kennedy and Ted Reardon and the other people, or did it?

KELSO: It didn't at all. Of course, Senator Kennedy did not vote on the McCarthy censure resolution. He didn't vote because he was critically ill in the hospital. I don't know, frankly, if he ever said how he would have voted. I can't recall.

STEWART: I don't think he specifically said. Even in the campaign he kept saying that he wasn't there and, therefore, he wasn't, so to speak, a member of the jury. Ted Sorensen again in his book said that he would have voted for the censure if he had been there.

KELSO: Well, I don't know. I just can't recall the Senator I think you have it right, that he just let it go. He wasn't a member of the jury. I think he felt that once he got out of the Senate and on the national stage, it was another ball game and that skill won.

STEWART: What was your impression of the relationship between Senator Kennedy and Senator McCarthy?

KELSO: I have reason to think that Senator Kennedy thought that McCarthy was brilliant in some respects, but erratic.

STEWART: Were you friendly with Senator McCarthy? Did you know Senator McCarthy?

KELSO: Yes, I knew him.

STEWART: Did you ever hear him comment on Senator Kennedy or . . .

KELSO: No. No, I didn't. Neither did I hear him comment on Robert F. Bob Kennedy, even when he was on the committee. From over the years I think I've summed up, as best I can, what I regard as Senator Kennedy's view of Senator McCarthy, oh, say a year before McCarthy died. I think he thought that in many respects he was a brilliant man and in several respects erratic--if that's the right word, erratic, and I seem to think it is.

STEWART: Were Ted Reardon and Senator Kennedy really fearful of the political implications of being on the wrong side of the McCarthy issue?

KELSO: No. Not that I can recall. No. Because Senator Kennedy, you've got to realize, was out for months that time. That's very important. He went up to New York for the back operation. He was critically ill. Then he went to Florida. He didn't come back for months. During his absence, his office was pretty flat. It was a holding operation.

STEWART: It lasted for a good eight or nine months, I think, actually.

KELSO: Yes. Yes. And he came back. I can remember when he came up from Florida and held a press conference in his office.

STEWART: On the day he came back?

KELSO: Yes. Well, a day or two after. Yes.

STEWART: When the Post really started to sour on President Kennedy, did this have any impact on the stories that you were writing? Did they tend to use some and not use others? Or edit some and not edit others or cut them up or anything?

KELSO: Not with respect to Senator Kennedy. But I suppose a report No not that I know of, that I can remember. Of course, there isn't a reporter who ever lived who hasn't questioned the judgment of his paper and the way they do things. But no. As a matter of fact, I am hard put right now to recall the degree to which the Post, as I knew it, soured if at all on Kennedy, really soured on him.

STEWART: Oh yes. I haven't gone through them, but, for example, on the appointment of Scott McLeod, which Kennedy voted against, they really took off on that.

KELSO: As ambassador to Ireland?

STEWART: Right. And Robert Lee to the Federal Communications Commission.

KELSO: Yes. Well, I didn't write"Robert E. Lee to the FCC!" No, I didn't write either of those stories, as I recall. I must confess that my gauge was to write what would get printed. People can say to you, "A paper never told me what to write." Well, that's kind of meaningless. If you're worth your salt and you're getting paid and you've got to work for the outfit, you write what is going to get printed and preferably printed on page one. And more preferably above the fold, as they say. I just can't remember I knew Scot McLeod. I knew him when he was on the Hill. And I knew him when he was at the State Department. But I never did--that's my recollection--write the story of his appointment to Ireland. Now, oddly, I can recall the appointment of William Howard, III Taft as ambassador to Ireland, Senator

[Robert A.] Taft's son. And Griffin was very pleased about that. As I recall, I wrote stories on that. I think he was McLeod's--would he be predecessor or successor? He was Senator Taft's son.

STEWART: Yes. I vaguely recall it. Do you recall anything about the relationship of Senator Kennedy and the majority leader in these early years? Do you ever remember him commenting on, either he or Ted Reardon commenting, on their relationship with Lyndon Johnson in '53 or '54 or '55?

KELSO: No. No, I don't. Kennedy was very pleased that Lyndon Johnson put him on the Foreign Relations Committee.

STEWART: This was in '57.

KELSO: Of course, I can see now that as a Senator, Kennedy was running for the presidency almost from the day he got in there. I can see that now.

STEWART: There was never any talk in those . . .

KELSO: No, there wasn't. No. But he was always going for the national scene, the good of the country. Now the St. Lawrence Seaway, that was in the national interest. In retrospect, the story unfolds logically.

STEWART: Actually, it was going to be built anyway. Canada was going to build it . . .

KELSO: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. Sure. In fairness to myself, I was stunned when the Boston Post attacked Kennedy for voting for the Seaway. But I never said it. You can't go around saying that when you're representing the paper.

STEWART: What about the relationships of Kennedy's office and that of Senator [Leverett] Saltonstall? A lot has been written, of course, about how well

they cooperated and so forth. Do you recall this in the early '50's or in the early years of . . .

KELSO: Yes. Without going deeply, if I could, into the reasons why, Saltonstall and Kennedy were extremely close and friendly and admired each other very much.

STEWART: You say there are some reasons that you know of . . .

KELSO: No. I would not think Because Jack Kennedy was a political animal, in the finest sense of the word, and Saltonstall was a Republican. And let's face it, he was pretty good politically, too. But they just respected each other and liked each other. It was very obvious.

STEWART: Do you recall this causing any problems with any other Massachusetts Democratic Congressmen or with [John W.] McCormack's office, this relationship between Kennedy and Saltonstall?

KELSO: No, I don't.

STEWART: It would seem logical that there would be a certain amount of . . .

KELSO: Yes. Yes. I thought you were going to go a step further possibly, and probably you are. Any difficulties between the McCormack and the Kennedy offices. . . . Well, way back there was no question there was no love lost between the two offices. No, there was no question at all.

STEWART: As far as the treatment that you got, the accessibility to Kennedy and so forth, did you always consider this fair vis a vis other reporters from Boston newspapers? Were there ever any problems of him playing favorites, so to speak, in the early Senate years?

KELSO: No. Not as far as I was concerned. Because he was very good to me. And Ted Reardon was very good to me and very close to me. And I had complete access. I couldn't ask for better treatment.

STEWART: Well, let's get into this McCormack-Kennedy business. Of course, in 1956 there was a big fight up in Massachusetts about the state Democratic Chairman. Do you recall this or did you have anything to do with that as far as reporting it.

KELSO: As I remember, I had little if anything to do with it. The Post, I do know, was advocating the candidacy of a man named [William H.] Burke, was it?

STEWART: Right. Onions Burke.

KELSO: Onions Burke, whom I didn't know. I shook hands with him once in McCormack's office. But I wrote nothing about that. No. That was purely a Massachusetts story as far as I was concerned. I was aware of it. That's why I say in those days there was some antagonism between the two offices.

STEWART: What about the impressions or the reputation, so to speak, of Senator Kennedy in these early years? You, being around the Senate, must have picked up a certain amount of gossip and scuttlebutt from other people's offices and so forth. Did he have a fairly good reputation with other senators or with the staff people in other senators' offices?

KELSO: Oh, yes. Sure he did. They could sense that he was a popular political figure. And in the Senate, that's a strong statement. They knew that. They knew it quickly, too, when he almost got the vice presidency.

STEWART: Do you recall when you first started to hear talk about his running for the vice presidency in 1956?

KELSO: No. I don't. I just can't say.

STEWART: Were you at the Convention?

KELSO: In '56?

STEWART: In Chicago. When Stevenson was nominated and they had the open fight primarily with [Estes] Kefauver and Kennedy.

KELSO: Gee, it's funny. I can't remember whether I was in '56 or not. Who was the Republican?

STEWART: Eisenhower.

KELSO: Eisenhower, for the second time. I don't know whether I was or not.

STEWART: Did you cover that campaign at all in '56?

KELSO: No. I was in Washington, I think. There were matters here. Yes. '52 I covered, and then . . .

STEWART: You traveled with Stevenson extensively in '52?

KELSO: Oh, to a good degree. Yes. I was in Bloomington, Illinois, and all over the place, doing stories on the paper in which he owned an interest, the Bloomington Pantagraph. It's a Greek word meaning "print all." Yes, I was in that newspaper. I think it's P-a-n-t-a-g-r-a-p-h, the Bloomington Pantagraph.

STEWART: I'd forgotten what the name of that was.

KELSO: Yes. A very prosperous newspaper. I've been in Chicago many times for various political conferences--Republican Governors or Democratic Regional Conferences--and I just can't remember if I was at that '56 or saw it on television. I'm sorry.

STEWART: I think you undoubtedly would have remembered it if you were there. Well, that's all right because There's nothing else you recall about the whole bid that Kennedy made for the vice presidential nomination?

KELSO: No.

STEWART: Of course, right after that, starting in '57, it became very apparent that he was going to run in '60.

KELSO: Oh yes. I remember when they set up an office down in the Esso Building on Pennsylvania Avenue. I don't think it was generally well known. And that was a full year at least.

STEWART: Yes. That was in '58.

KELSO: Sure. I remember that very well.

STEWART: The Post folded in '56 in October. I looked up the date, October 4.

KELSO: Well, that may be one reason why I didn't go to the Convention.

STEWART: That's right. It was in its last stages then, I guess.

MRS.

KELSO: It was. We were getting checks, but they weren't any good.

STEWART: Really?

KELSO: Oh, yes.

STEWART: Do you recall discussing the status of the Post with Senator Kennedy?

KELSO: No. The financial status?

STEWART: It's always been said that he had a strong interest in journalism and in newspapers in general.

KELSO: No. I never discussed the status of the Post with him. No. I don't know why. Well, that's why I didn't go to the Convention in 1956. I must have seen it on television. I went to work for Gannett [News Service] I guess a week or two after the Post folded. I can remember another Boston paper offered me a job sometime before the Post folded and telling me the Post was going under. And I thought the guy was crazy. I was one of the last to know. I was down here in Washington.

STEWART: Did your relationships change when you were no longer a Boston reporter, so to speak?

KELSO: No. I'd had so many active years with them that they knew me pretty well. It's a fairly small circle, in this great big city, of politicians and newspapermen. And they all know each other pretty well. No, it didn't. Then again, I didn't cover his office. But I would meet him at hearings, of course. He was on the McClellan Committee, the investigating committee. I covered those because they were good copy. So I kept up my close acquaintanceship with him and Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] all those years.

STEWART: What do you recall about the McClellan hearings? Do you recall anything as far as their interests or the reasons why they were getting into it so deep? There was a real question as to whether they should get into it as deeply as they did and get so committed to this whole business.

KELSO: You mean on labor . . .

STEWART: Yes. It was a very risky thing politically.

KELSO: Yes, it was, I suppose. I don't know. But Senator Kennedy wasn't committed as deeply as Bobby. He sat in on the hearings. I can't remember him taking a burning interest. No.

STEWART: It was primarily Robert Kennedy through the whole thing.

KELSO: Yes. Yes.

STEWART: In '57 and '58, of course, it became apparent that he was going to run in 1960. Do you recall when you really knew that he was going to run in 1960?

KELSO: Oh, there was no question at all that he was running many months before he did. When he set up the office in the Esso Building, I knew. I used to walk by there. If I couldn't get a cab from Capitol Hill to the Press Building, I'd walk some days. It would take me twenty minutes which would be ten longer than if I'd waited for a cab and taken the cab. Many a time I saw members of Senator Kennedy's camp going in and out of the Esso Building. There wasn't much really you could write about it. Everybody had known he ran for the vice presidency, and he was setting up another national operation of some sort. Yes, that's when I don't know when they set up that office, about a year I guess before the . . .

STEWART: I think it was in late '58, or maybe early '59.

KELSO: I've been up in the office. Oh yes. It seems to me it was on the third or fourth floor.

STEWART: I think [Stephen E.] Steve Smith set it up originally, and then O'Brien, and O'Donnell and those people moved in.

KELSO: Yes. Yes. And Ted Reardon was down there considerably, too.

STEWART: Ted spent most of his time handling the Senate affairs, didn't he?

KELSO: Oh yes. But I saw him there. I would say that those other people you mentioned undoubtedly played a more prominent role in that office, and that's where they started moving.

STEWART: As one who had known Senator Kennedy from his earlier days, was there much interest among reporters in finding out more about him? Was there a problem? Did people come to you and ask you . . .

KELSO: Yes. Yes, they did. Yes, I was pretty well identified with the city of Boston, mostly, I think, because of my accent. I've never lost my Boston accent. People constantly were asking me. There were many things that now people take for granted that people then had no idea of. They'd never heard of Money Fitz [John F. Fitzgerald], for instance.

STEWART: But columnists started to become interested in these things, I guess.

KELSO: Oh yes. Oh yes.

STEWART: Bob Thompson was his press secretary when? During the Senate campaign in '58, I think.

KELSO: Yes, for a very short period of time.

STEWART: Do you know what happened or why he didn't stay around?

KELSO: No, I don't. Well, of course, Bob worked for INS [International News Service]. INS folded. This is how I remember it, at any rate. Bob went with Senator Kennedy's staff. He stayed a year or less. And then, I think, he went with the New York Daily News. Am I right?

STEWART: I'm not sure.

KELSO: And then from the News, he went with the Los Angeles Times.

STEWART: But again, it's often been said that there were a lot of problems and a lot of friction within Senator Kennedy's office as the office got bigger and as the drive towards the nomination went on. Were you

aware at all, were there any frictions, do you recall?

KELSO: No, I wasn't. I'm sure there were. There isn't any office that No, I'm not aware of any.

STEWART: Did you cover the primaries in Wisconsin or West Virginia?

KELSO: No. I picked up Senator Kennedy's presidential campaign in Los Angeles. I was at the Convention. I flew from the Convention to Hyannis Port. And then I flew around the country with him.

STEWART: Had you done any traveling before that as far as his trips were concerned?

KELSO: No. None at all. But on the campaign I had a pretty long sustained stretch. It was the longest single stretch, I believe, of any newspaperman. The wires were on and off for a week a lot. And others would hop on and off. I stayed on most of the time, for weeks on end.

STEWART: How did you spend most of your time at the Convention? You were writing, covering the Convention?

KELSO: Yes. I was working for the Gannett Newspapers at the time. Paul Miller, who is head of the Associated Press now and is also still the president of Gannett Newspapers, came in one morning and read a story I'd written. At a convention I'd always try to write a story in the morning, stick it in my pocket, and walk around with it sort of as insurance in case I couldn't file one at night. And if I could, I could file one right away and one later. Well, I was writing sort of a semi-feature story on Jack Kennedy, and I did use the phrase "Honey Fitz" and I'd thrown in a lot of material about Boston and so forth. Miller read it. I'm sure it was news to him. The result was that I was put on the campaign. I expected to return to Washington from Los Angeles. Instead I went to Hyannis. It was my finest hour, in a way.

STEWART: About the Convention, what were your impressions of Pierre Salinger's operation at that Convention? Were you satisfied? Did you get as much from him as

KELSO: Well, the work was new to Pierre. It was new to him in Hyannis. But Pierre always had a flair. And I liked him very much. I liked his operation. Sometimes the names wouldn't be spelled correctly, and an 11 o'clock press conference could mean, as often as not, 11:30 or 12 o'clock. And a 4 o'clock one could mean 4:30 or 5. There were deadlines. He could be aggravating. But he was good humored, and he had a flair. And sure, I enjoyed him very much. He was a very witty press secretary. One day in Palm Beach somebody discovered that President-elect Kennedy played golf and one of his drives had hit a Secret Service man. Salinger was asked about this. It was a little touchy and funny because Ike [Dwight D. Eisenhower] was a golfer, and there were mild political overtones, I suppose. Salinger admitted that a Kennedy drive had winged a Secret Service man. Then he said, "But it was only on the bounce." Some guy asked him, "Which bounce?" Pierre said, "The second." The thing broke up in laughter. There were innumerable incidents that Pierre handled that way. It was fun being with him. That's all, fun. And Jack Kennedy knew it, too.

STEWART: Well, I was just asking you about any criticism you may have had of Pierre Salinger's operation.

KELSO: No, I thought it was superb. No one's perfect, and Pierre worked under speed and pressure. And so names now and then wouldn't be right. I don't know whether it was his fault or not, but he still carried over the same habit of holding an 11 o'clock press conference at 11:30. I know you can say, "Look, the White House can't operate at the pleasure of the press and convenience of the press. It should be the other way around." I know all that. But personally, those were the two little things that would irritate me because I was writing, at the time, for many newspapers. And if I misspelled a name, it would do me no good to say, "That's the way the White House spelled it." But those are minor. Pierre was a magnificent press secretary.

When the troops got restive out there, he knew it and he could kid them along. He could make mistakes, I suppose. I remember the day he blurted out, unintentionally I'm sure, that the White House staff signed, shall we say, secrecy oaths or whatever not to write. And I guess he got unshirted hell for saying that. But as Pierre would say, "Despite recent developments, we are plowing straight ahead." [Laughter]

STEWART: Do you remember any other instances of this, where he gave out something that he didn't want you to use?

KELSO: No, I don't.

STEWART: What about access to other people in the White House? Did you talk to them at all?

KELSO: Well, any that I wanted to, I could, I could always talk to Ted Sorensen, who was magnificent in the White House. No question about it. You could always talk to Ted Sorensen; you could always talk to Larry O'Brien; you could always talk to Ken O'Donnell; and you certainly could always talk to Pierre or to [Andrew T.] Andy Hatcher. So I felt that I was pretty well covering the waterfront there. Occasionally you could talk to the President of the United States.

STEWART: In backgrounders, other than the press conferences, did you see him much or at all?

KELSO: The President?

STEWART: Yes.

KELSO: Oh, I saw him several times in his office. Yes.

STEWART: Do you remember specifically what they were about.

KELSO: No. They were mostly backgrounders. And the same was true with Ted Sorensen. Not for attribution.

STEWART: You don't recall anything unusual, or what the news was, or what the items were that you were talking about?

KELSO: No, I don't.

STEWART: Did you see much of Ted Reardon during that time?

KELSO: Oh, yes, but I didn't do much business with Ted. Now Ted had a different job. He had about the same job in the White House that he had on the Hill. But in the context of the two places, it was just the news wasn't there for me. I'd known Ted and always did. I remember when Ted was given a party, one of the best I ever went to, a testimonial affair. I was pleased and honored to go. There were only about fifty, say, at the party. The President was there.

STEWART: At the White House?

KELSO: No. This was at a hotel. I forget the name of the hotel. The President was there. He came in, about 9 o'clock and stayed an hour, shook hands with everybody and talked and laughed. He thought a lot of Ted Reardon. Ted always did play a bigger role in that whole operation than most people realize.

STEWART: Why do you say that?

KELSO: Because he was so close to the President. He never wrote a book; he stayed out of the limelight. He always did. A very bright fellow, a Harvard man, doesn't wear his learning on his sleeve. He'd go to the White House and have dinner with the President alone. And he wouldn't be telling anybody about it either, for print.

STEWART: Was there always a good deal of serious competition among White House reporters as far as getting to the various members of the staff and getting leaks from various people?

KELSO: A great deal. Despite the informal atmosphere, the competition at the White House level is intense, terribly intense. Sure, a great deal of competition.

STEWART: Was there ever any attempt to cut down on this or to get around it at all?

KELSO: No. I think really the White House then relished it. President Kennedy liked newspapermen, and Pierre Salinger certainly did. And they enjoyed, I think, seeing them go after news and operate. They just enjoyed it. And they understood it.

STEWART: Just for information, how many newspapers or what kind of newspapers are in the Gannett

KELSO: At that time there were about twenty-three. I read a piece the other day that now they have thirty dailies and fourteen weeklies, three television stations and six radio. But at that time, I think there were twenty-three.

STEWART: Were you the only White House correspondent?

KELSO: Yes, for Gannett. Yes.

STEWART: You covered just the White House, nothing else.

KELSO: That's right.

STEWART: You spent all your days

KELSO: All my days Oh, 90 per cent of my time.

STEWART: Did you travel at all? Did you make the trip to Europe?

KELSO: No.

STEWART: Or go weekends to Hyannis or . . .

KELSO: Oh yes. Well, I think once or twice.

STEWART: I think I've run out of questions unless there is anything else you can think of.

KELSO: It might be interesting, I don't know. It's interesting to me. I don't know how significant it is. I can remember the first time that I saw Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy. I forget the year, but at that time I was with the Boston Post, and I had a weekly radio program out of Washington. It went over WBZ. It came on at 10 o'clock and was on till 10:30. I'd get two political figures on, a Democrat and a Republican, and I'd have my questions and let them go. I think Senator Kennedy was on Well, I know he was on twice. I think this night which I am referring to, he was on with Senator [George D.] Aiken of Vermont. And when Senator Kennedy came in, there was a young girl, a brunette, carrying his brief case. And that was Jacqueline Kennedy.

STEWART: Did you have him on that show at other times?

KELSO: Twice, I think. I can remember two times. It could have been more. It ran for about a year and a half or two years. Oh yes, I had everybody, I guess, in New England on, who was in Congress.

STEWART: Are there tapes or anything of those?

KELSO: Well, there could be up at WBZ.

STEWART: WBZ must have some.

KELSO: I remember Margaret Chase Smith was on with John McCormack.

STEWART: Sorensen said she was one of two enemies that Senator Kennedy had in the Senate. And I've always assumed the reason was that he campaigned against her in 1956.

KELSO: That's news to me. I never knew that. No. I never knew that.

STEWART: But just bitter enemies I guess.

KELSO: I didn't know that. I don't know who his other one was.

STEWART: Senator McCarthy.

KELSO: Oh really? Enemy?

STEWART: That's what Ted Sorensen says.

KELSO: It could be. I don't know that.

MRS.

KELSO: Was he at the McCarthy wedding?

KELSO: I don't know.

MRS.

KELSO: Bobby was and the father were.

STEWART: When did he get married?

KELSO: Oh gosh, I can't remember. I've forgotten the year.

STEWART: Were you there?

KELSO: Oh yes. That was a big story around here. Half of Washington was at that. Oh yes. All sorts of people. I've forgotten the year. I was covering it as a news story. I think I was in the next to the last pew with the wire services.

MRS.

KELSO: Was it in '54?

STEWART: It was fairly late.

KELSO: I can remember Joe Kennedy being there and Jack

Dempsey. And I think that's where I met Bobby and Ethel Kennedy for the first time. But that's about all I can remember of it.

MRS.

KELSO: Well, Bobby was working for him at the time.

KELSO: Yes. But I didn't know that Margaret Chase Smith nor Joe McCarthy were enemies. There could be something here that I don't know about.

STEWART: Were you at Senator McCarthy's funeral?

KELSO: No, I wasn't.

STEWART: Again, I think Robert Kennedy was there. It was in '56 or '57, I think.

KELSO: No, I wasn't there. In those years I was just interested in getting in the newspaper. I was a working newspaperman, and I wrote the stories that I thought would attract the editor's interest. As I say, covering John Kennedy's campaign and so forth, I had a lot of new ideas. And this is a self-serving statement, but in far-off Australia and so forth, I got a little notice, incidentally, through some government agency that they were taking contributions for the Kennedy Library. I sent a check. Little realizing that I'd be talking here tonight.

STEWART: What was it about Senator McCarthy or what particular aspects of his personality or his activities were appealing to the editors of the Post and to readers in Massachusetts?

KELSO: I can't answer that question. He was national news, not only in Massachusetts. He was national.

STEWART: But he had a particular appeal in Massachusetts.

KELSO: Well, I wasn't up there. I was here. He was national news. And I suppose when Massachusetts witnesses were here, it was news.

MRS.

KELSO: But wasn't it John Fox that wanted a lot of McCarthy?

KELSO: No. I don't know.

STEWART: This is completely confidential as far as . . .

KELSO: Well, I simply don't know.

STEWART: Okay. I'm sorry. The reason I was asking because I think, based purely on what people have written about Senator Kennedy and his relations with McCarthy, I think that in fifteen or twenty or twenty-five years historians are going to be very interested in the relationship because Senator McCarthy had a certain appeal to people in Massachusetts, and historians are going to be looking at this appeal and wondering how it connects with the political career of John Kennedy.

KELSO: I heard your question over an hour ago, and I gave you what I thought was a considered a fairly accurate answer. I could be wrong. You asked me, as I recall, what Senator Kennedy thought of Senator McCarthy, and I answered that Senator Kennedy, in my opinion, thought that Senator McCarthy in several respects was brilliant and in other respects erratic. And I really don't know any more. During the time of the McCarthy censure, the vote, Senator Kennedy wasn't here. I suppose at the time, I know at the time, people thought he ducked that vote. Well, I think I was in many ways a responsible newspaperman. I'd write a good, hard, smashing story if I could. But here was Kennedy with a back that he couldn't live with and went in and almost died and then went to Florida, and to attribute it to politics--that's how it turned out. That's all. And you can read a thousand things into it. I can't. I mean, I can't tell you. I can do the same thing. I can speculate. But I

don't know. I remember when he left the Senate to go to the hospital. He was walking around, my recollection, first with a cane. He braved it out. Then on crutches. It was fairly pathetic. And then when he came back, after all those months, I think, he had a cane. And I think, further, that he had to go back to crutches. It was a terrible ordeal. And I can't remember over the years whether any paper printed I sure didn't. I didn't write that he went into the hospital to

STEWART: Oh no, no. I don't think people . . .

KELSO: So I don't know. Sorensen I had long conversations with. And that's that. But I I was moving around pretty well. I had to write a story every night. But I heard enough off the record stories in my life so that at the end I wasn't interested really. I just couldn't afford the luxury. I didn't have the time. I had to get a pretty good one every day. I thought I did.

STEWART: Okay. Is there anything else you can think of?

KELSO: No. That's about it.

[END SIDE I, BEGIN SIDE II]

STEWART: As far as the Convention, you were writing primarily features?

KELSO: No. I was writing news.

STEWART: At the Convention?

KELSO: Oh yes. And features. See, I'd write a feature story in the morning.

STEWART: Could you briefly describe a typical situation of trying to get something at a political convention where, of course, there are so many people and things are so confused. And the distances at Los Angeles were so tremendous, just getting around was a problem.

KELSO: Yes. For one thing, most of the candidates were in that big hotel on Pershing Square, the Biltmore. The problem at any hotel during a convention is getting an elevator. It's unbelievably tough. It seems like a nightmare when I think of it, trying to get an elevator to go from the fourth floor to the twelfth or whatever. Your question was, I'm sorry I . . .

STEWART: I just wanted to get something of the flavor of a reporter trying to cover a political convention such as the one in 1960.

KELSO: Well, all I can tell you is how I worked. We had an office in the press room, or what was set up as the press room, in the Biltmore. We had four or five typewriters in there, a TV set, a couple of comfortable chairs. I'd check in at 9 a.m., and I'd plan to be in bed at 1 a.m. This would be only for a week, and I'd be prepared to take this. I would read, say, the paper till 10 or so. And then I'd try to write a news feature story to put on the night wire at 6 p.m. when the night press rates go in. And if I had that ready to go, it could go winging in over the wire, and I'm in. The story is no good if it's in your pocket. It must be in the office. That's one half of it. And then afternoons, I would poke around the headquarters, go out in the heat of Los Angeles, over to the Statler, sometimes out to the Ambassador. I'd talk with Massachusetts politicians, the delegates, all sorts of delegates. Then I'd get out to the convention hall late in the afternoon, and I'd walk the corridors. You know, you report the action on the floors, and you never know. If you're moving, you might pick up news. I'd be through till 11, and then I'd read the papers and go to bed. It's not a glamorous job at all. It's a plodding job. The one meeting of that Convention that I will never forget is the confrontation, really . . .

STEWART: Oh, you were there?

KELSO: It was between LBJ and JFK. It was rough. LBJ was rough. There is no question about it. I will never forget it.

STEWART: What do you recall as far as the atmosphere? Was there a real tension in the room?

KELSO: There was a real tension. LBJ sailed into Jack Kennedy. There's no question about it. He bested him in that debate. I don't know whether that's on tape or not.

STEWART: Oh, I'm sure it is.

KELSO: I'm sure it is. My recollection is that Jack Kennedy said with sort of a rueful laugh, but knowing that he was a winner, sensing it, and steeling himself against committing any faux pas, saying, "Well, that just goes to show that you shouldn't debate with Lyndon Johnson." That is the one thing that stands out in my mind. It hasn't been too highly publicized, that debate. It was in a hotel room off the first floor lobby of the Biltmore. Not a room, but like a reception area. There were, for a guess, a couple hundred people there.

STEWART: There were both the Texas and Massachusetts delegations. You mentioned that you met and ran into people from Massachusetts. Do you remember who specifically? Do you remember what they were doing or what their attitudes were or what their feelings on the whole thing were?

KELSO: You see, I've had some busy years, too, since that Convention. I can remember talking to John McCormack at the Convention Hall, who was working then for Jack Kennedy. And I can remember the Speaker drawing on his cigar and saying, "He's a winner. He's an easy winner." Now others I can't. I can remember some show business personalities there, of course, Peter Lawford and Sammy Davis, Jr. I can remember Adlai Stevenson's futile attempt to win the nomination.

STEWART: Do you remember anything else that Speaker McCormack said?

KELSO: No. It was a brief conversation. It was quite

touching. Even then he was getting along in years. Jack Kennedy was forty or so. He said, "He's a winner." I can remember that.

STEWART: You say you went right from there to Hyannis Port, and you picked up the campaign?

KELSO: Yes.

STEWART: Of course, they came back for a special session here.

KELSO: Yes. And then he went out, started going out West. I can't remember the first stops.

STEWART: Do you remember anything specific about going back to Hyannis right after the Convention? I think he stayed there probably a week or so. A number of people kept coming up to see him. Johnson came up. I think, and a number of people. Do you remember this period?

KELSO: I don't remember Lyndon Johnson coming up there. I do remember Allen Dulles.

STEWART: This was right after the Convention?

KELSO: I believe so. The briefing, you know. Yes, I remember Allen Dulles. I just can't because I returned to Hyannis many times. I just don't know who came up right after the Convention.

STEWART: Could you give a little bit of the atmosphere of the press plane. They had separate planes that moved members of the press around.

KELSO: The Caroline. No, it wasn't the Caroline. I'm sorry. That was the President's plane. That was known to us as the mother ship. We had a press plane, and then there was also a third plane for photographers and television crewmen. It was a three plane flotilla. The

press plane was very good. The people were generally pounding away at typewriters, quite slowly because the typewriters would be on their knees. Ken O'Donnell and [William J.] Bill Hartigan and Pierre Salinger would be on the plane. It was an informal, pleasant atmosphere.

STEWART: Did they start this business right away of giving you a verbatim transcript of his speech because he ad libbed so much? Didn't it get to be a problem? They had a steno man who went . . .

KELSO: Yes. Yes. And stenographers on the plane. And I recall vividly that as we'd be taking off the stenographers would be tapping out copies, cutting a stencil. The service was excellent. Sure.

STEWART: You stayed with the Kennedy thing all the way through. You didn't have any contact with the Nixon . . .

KELSO: No. And I wasn't with Kennedy all the way through. I was off for a few days. But for the most part I was with him from around the country until he flew into Boston election eve, voted, and then flew down to Hyannis from Boston to wait out the results. And then, I guess, from Hyannis we went to Palm Beach.

STEWART: As far as the crowds were concerned, were you always trying to estimate them or did you always take the word of whoever was giving out the word on the size of the crowds?

KELSO: I never got into that crowd business too much. I just couldn't tell, and there were so many conflicting claims and figures. The enthusiasm of the crowds was what I could judge. I thought I could.

STEWART: You could tell degrees?

KELSO: Well, at times a really unrestrained enthusiasm. Yes. Now there probably was for Nixon. I don't know. But Kennedy was a good campaigner. It was

tough. There were a lot of middle-aged men on the press plane who would be up all night, sleeping in those planes. He tried to treat us very well, but it was a grueling job. Of course, he could rest on the Caroline. It was another matter entirely. But I never got into the crowd estimations.

STEWART: Did you see a real change in him as far as his enthusiasm or his mannerisms or speaking techniques were concerned as the campaign went on?

KELSO: Yes, I did. As I indicated earlier, I can see now how he changed from year to year as he was in the Senate and then when he ran for the presidency. And as a campaigner, I could see him change too. I remember late in the campaign when he was in Jersey. There he was, sort of patrician-like and a throwback to Honey Fitz. He had a toughness about him. He punished himself physically during that campaign, as I suppose any presidential candidate does. But I know he did. I saw him. I was on the Caroline as a pool reporter. He'd get on pretty tired.

STEWART: How often did you--every three or four days about would you get to go on the Caroline?

KELSO: No. Not that often. And it was all right with me, too, because that meant that you had to give a pretty good report to your colleagues. And if you didn't get the material they wanted, they'd be put out.

STEWART: Did you get to talk to him at all during the whole thing?

KELSO: Oh yes. Several times. Oh yes. He was completely accessible. He was on a schedule. He was giving speeches here and there. You had copies of them in advance half the time at least. He uttered some memorable lines, some that were fairly pedestrain, of course, many that were highly poetical. But there were flashes in his speeches, of course. I was at Wittenberg College in Ohio when he told the students there that Bismack, I think, said that one third

of the students will die of dissipation, another third of overwork, and the remaining third will rule Germany. He delivered that line beautifully, and it went over quite well in Ohio that day. I can remember him once stopping his motorcade, I think in Wisconsin, walking into a little country schoolhouse, to the surprise of the teacher, picking up the chalk, and writing on blackboard, "Wisdom is power.--Bacon" and bowing and walking out.

STEWART: Just like that?

KELSO: Just like that.

STEWART: He didn't say anything?

KELSO: No. Not that I can remember. I don't know. But that's the gist of it. That was either Wisconsin or Ohio. It was the morning that we left Green Bay, Wisconsin.

STEWART: Can you think of any other little anecdotes like that?

KELSO: On the campaign?

STEWART: Were you on the train? They made a train swing in California.

KELSO: No, I wasn't on that. No, that's the one I didn't make.

STEWART: Were you down in Texas when he went to Houston to meet the ministers?

KELSO: No. No, I wasn't there that day.

STEWART: Were you on that last swing up through New England through Connecticut, especially that stop at Waterbury?

KELSO: Oh, I sure was. We went in late at night. I forget the hour. It seems to me it was midnight. We were running way behind schedule. And people were

lining the roads in little New England towns and villages. Sure.

STEWART: Were most of the reporters getting pretty weary about this stage of the campaign?

KELSO: Oh, they were beat. They were beat.

STEWART: I imagine it would get to be pretty repetitious after a while.

KELSO: Yes. It was a question of physical endurance in trying to write copy that sparkled somewhat. The way I would do it would be to tap out about a paragraph every hour.

STEWART: Really?

KELSO: Yes.

STEWART: Throughout the whole day.

KELSO: Right. And then send it in along about 3 o'clock, "Lead to come." For instance, "The candidate left Green Bay in a light rain and motorcaded to near-by so-and-so where he spoke to so-and-so. His next stop was Milwaukee where he received a tumultuous greeting." And that's for sure. Then if he was speaking that night in Albuquerque, you'd sent it in with an Albuquerque dateline, three paragraphs. Now that's the press and speed of journalism. There was a man of talent who rode along named [Theodore H.] Teddy White, who could just take notes, you see, and then write a magnificent book. But when you're banging it out for Western Union, who had a man aboard the plane, it's a different matter. The story is no good up in the airplane. You've got to figure the stops and where you can file it and a lot of things.

STEWART: It really must have become grueling after a while.

KELSO: It was. It was grueling.

STEWART: Especially the same thing day in and day out.

KELSO: Yes.

STEWART: It was just one motorcade after another.

KELSO: Of course, Palm Beach after the election was magnificent.

STEWART: Well, he went down and then he came back, didn't he? That's when his son was born?

KELSO: Yes. But he went down first for a week or ten days. And that's when he flew down to see Nixon south of Miami. He also flew down to LBJ's ranch.

STEWART: Did you go there?

KELSO: I did.

STEWART: Do you recall anything interesting about that?

KELSO: Well, the press stayed at Bergstrom Air Force Base, some distance from the ranch on the Pedernales. We stayed in little quarters that weren't so hot over A light bulb hanging from the ceiling. And we went over to the ranch. We all went over. And now President Johnson was a very good host. It was raining, and President Kennedy stayed overnight. That's when he went deer hunting. I wasn't on the deer hunt. I don't know who was.

STEWART: But some reporters actually went along?

KELSO: I don't know whether there was a pool reporter or not. Of course, all sorts of stories came out. Jack Kennedy wasn't enthralled at all, shooting scrawny deer from a jeep.

STEWART: Yes. I've heard stories about that. In fact, I think he shot one, didn't he?

KELSO: That I don't know. We rode on the same plane with him. That is to and from Palm Beach to Texas. And, of course, the plane was full of stories on how Jack Kennedy didn't like to shoot deer down there. And my recollection is that the deer are about the size of goats, according to the reports on the plane. They weren't great big things crashing through the Maine woods.

STEWART: What do you recall about election night in Hyannis? Were you down there?

KELSO: What I recall most vividly is how John Kennedy ran up a big lead and then lost that big lead as the night wore on. That created great excitement. I think the press was all quartered in the Armory in Hyannis. It was a big Armory really. And many papers, in their first editions, announced that Kennedy won in a landslide. Then, of course, I remember the next day, the secret service arriving. There was still a little doubt, people weren't conceding. And everybody was very tired at that point.

STEWART: You must have been looking forward to something else, some change of scenery.

KELSO: I think everybody was, but nobody realized where the President-elect was going. We had no idea we were going to Palm Beach. I don't believe I did. I'd never been there before, and it was great. I went back several times. The people treated us very well. The press stayed in the Palm Beach Towers, thanks to Pierre Salinger.

STEWART: Really?

KELSO: Well, Pierre, there's a good thing about him, you know, you went first class with Pierre. Of course, our offices were picking up the checks. But Pierre established a press room in the Palm Beach Towers--in a little room, incidentally, about thirty feet from the swimming pool. And it was all very good. We'd go over occasionally to the President-elect's home. In fact, he gave a party over there

one noontime for the press and their wives who were along. Yes. Very pleasant, very nice. As he did at Hyannis. He had a lot of wives out on the Honey Fitz and gave them his famous clam chowder.

MRS.

KELSO: Fish chowder.

STEWART: What was it?

MRS.

KELSO: Fish chowder.

STEWART: Were you there?

MRS.

KELSO: Yes.

KELSO: Fish chowder. Yes. My wife came up to Hyannis. And she was on the Honey Fitz and had the fish chowder. Oh, I'm sorry.

STEWART: Why don't you get in it? What do you recall about that cruise on the Honey Fitz? Or was it a cruise or just a . . .

MRS.

KELSO: No. We just went around the bay. I don't know whether it's a bay or a river. I really don't know that area too well.

STEWART: Was Mrs. Kennedy Oh, Mrs. Kennedy was expecting.

MRS.

KELSO: Yes. She was around there, but she wasn't in It was just a few of the wives along.

KELSO: Was Eunice Shriver there?

MRS.

KELSO: She was in the compound. And then we came back,

and there was a party in the compound.

KELSO: Yes. In the senior Kennedys' home. It was out in the yard of their home, and it was also in their home.

STEWART: He was there?

KELSO: He was there. And Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy was there and the President-elect's mother, Rose Kennedy, Sargent Shriver and Eunice Shriver.

MRS.

KELSO: And Bobby and Ethel and all the children.

STEWART: Did you talk to Ambassador Kennedy at all?

KELSO: I don't think he was there. No. He wasn't there.

MRS.

KELSO: He was there another time when we were there.

KELSO: I don't recall.

STEWART: Do you know him? Have you met him?

KELSO: Yes. Yes, I met him, Oh yes. Yes, over the years. The last time I think I met him was at one of the McClellan Committee hearings. He was there to see Senator Robert Kennedy, then the chief counsel to the McClellan committee, in action. And then, of course, he would often meet the plane at Palm Beach. But he would be in the background and very, quiet and affable.

STEWART: What were your impressions as to his role during the whole campaign?

KELSO: I hadn't met him. It was baffling to me.

STEWART: Was it discussed among reporters?

KELSO: Oh, sure. Sure. But I don't think anybody, at that

time at any rate, could pinpoint his role. The Los Angeles newspapers were full of stories that he had rented some villa in Los Angeles. Obviously, he was watching the events at the Convention very closely. And I suppose they indicated that he was masterminding the whole thing. But I never put much stock in that. No. No. John Kennedy was the national figure then and the politician. That was his field.

STEWART: You mentioned the accommodations at Palm Beach. Were the accommodations generally throughout the whole campaign pretty good?

KELSO: Excellent. Every time. Oh, yes. They were great in Los Angeles. We were in Washington one morning from about 3:00 to 5:00 a.m., I recall. Why, I don't know. I think the press . . .

STEWART: I heard this story. I think it may be the same story. You were in Kansas City, and they had some problems with a Negro fellow as far as the hotel. And they flew the whole crew back to Washington to the Marriott.

KELSO: That I don't know. You're telling me something. That could be the reason, but I don't know that. As a matter of fact, I said I could never figure it out. I do know, the next morning he went to Norfolk, Virginia. But we were in Washington for two or three hours. And we stayed at the Marriott. It was, I don't know, twenty dollars or so. It was the same everywhere we went. They were first class. And we'd have hot meals on that press plane. There were always sandwiches available. I'll tell you a sort of an amusing little story, true story. It has no great significance, although it does give a clue to President Kennedy's character and his interest in odd interesting little things. On the press plane we sat with our typewriter on our lap and pin our notes in the seat in front of us. And if we wanted a beer, we'd stick the beer in that flap in the seat in front of us. And a can would stick in there and stay there. And we could punch the typewriter,

look at the notes, and have the beer. Well, President Kennedy liked a good foreign beer occasionally. And he thought it would be good if the press could have this good beer. Is it alright to say the name of the beer?

STEWART: Yes.

KELSO: Heinekens. It came in bottles. So he installed it in the press plane. Yelps went up. He couldn't understand it. You see, the bottle would slip down in that pocket, unlike the can. He heard the whole thing out, right in the middle of the campaign with a million problems. And he got a big bang out of it.

STEWART: Really? The people actually talked to him about it?

KELSO: Oh, sure. Sure. Salinger and O'Donnell were great, and Hartigan, on such homely little details. And Kennedy thought sure, it would be fine if the press could have this good beer. Didn't want it because of the bottles slipping down.

STEWART: Do you remember him getting irritated with reporters seeking certain types of information or asking certain questions during the campaign?

KELSO: Yes. I can. It's not answering your question directly, no, but, in general. I got on the Caroline one morning as a pool reporter, and Kennedy picked up the morning papers, and there was a big streamer headline on something that Nixon had said or advocated. And I wish I could remember what it was. I can't. Kennedy threw the paper down in disgust and uttered a couple of expletives of disdain.

STEWART: He was capable of that.

KELSO: Yes. But I can't remember him finding fault with reporters. Of course, he got a magnificent press. He really did. And it's hard for me to see how you could read anything sinister into it at all regarding the

press. The wire services were there. They were reporting Kennedy, period. And you could always hear him speak. You could always get an answer from Salinger--or Andy Hatcher, let's not forget him, who was wonderful on the campaign. Hartigan was sort of the baggage master. O'Donnell was, I don't know, he was along there doing everything, nothing too small to do. Pierre had a couple of secretaries on the plane. So they worked hard and provided the reporters with great service, on the campaign I'm talking about. And how the Nixon planes ran, I don't know. That basically, in my opinion, is That's the main reason Kennedy got the good press from that press plane.

STEWART: You never heard any comments from people who had been on the Nixon plane or any comparisons that they would make.

KELSO: No, I didn't. I'd always heard that [Herbert G.] Herb Klein was a fine fellow, very accommodating. But I drew the inference that they weren't as hard hitting and as constant in their efforts to push out the news as the Kennedy press crew was. They never stopped. This thing would start at 8 or 9 in the morning and wind up at midnight. I can remember we flew to Lewiston, Maine, one night, got up there close to midnight. I think it was out of Jersey City, around there. It was a whirlwind campaign. The cliché fits.

STEWART: Were you at the Boston Garden that last night?

KELSO: Yes. I can remember a very funny incident on the press plane. To me it's funny, at any rate. We were flying into Boston. And some fellow was writing an early lead. And he looked up. He knew the answer, but he was being facetious because he knew that everybody else would probably be using the word. And he said, "How do you spell tumultuous?" It was that, in the Boston Garden. It sure was.

STEWART: Did you go to all these sessions? Was there always a problem of getting I can just see the

Boston Garden--there must have been about eighteen thousand people there. Did you frequently have a problem of getting to the press area or where you were going?

KELSO: No. I don't know how we went from We were staying at the Statler. Probably by bus. I'm sure it was by bus. And Hartigan was in charge of the bus. He'd come off an airline, and he was good at it. He had the voice and mannerisms of a KP pusher, but a very pleasant personality. And he could move that bus and the newsmen. No. Waterbury, Connecticut the press arrangements, it seems to me, were kind of difficult. And in Madison Square Garden one night they were. But they weren't in Boston Garden. Without defaming Waterbury, it seems to me we arrived there very late. And the officials were both overwhelmed and overawed by the whole thing with the result that they got over officious. That is my recollection.

STEWART: Did you find that in other places at all?

KELSO: No. Except oddly, it seems to me, in Madison Square Garden we had difficulty one night. And that's about it. Chicago got a bit wild. But the officials were fine. The crowds were really almost unruly with enthusiasm. And riding through New York City one day, it was really frightening. People thought the buses were going to be tipped over.

STEWART: Really?

KELSO: Yes.

STEWART: I've heard that the police have a way of controlling or letting crowds go.

KELSO: I don't know. I don't know.

STEWART: What did you do primarily during the transition period before the Inauguration? Were you at Palm Beach and then

KELSO: We were at Palm Beach, and then, of course, I was out in Georgetown standing in the cold and in the snow while the President-elect interviewed prospective Cabinet appointees. Byron White showed up, Douglas Dillon, who did not go in the Cabinet. He did. I'm sorry. I meant Robert Patterson. Dean Rusk, I think, put in his first appearance late one evening in Palm Beach. I was there at the airport when he flew in. But it was Palm Beach--my recollections are Palm Beach and standing in the bitter cold snow out in Georgetown and the nice woman across the street letting us wait in there a lot. Chester Bowles came in. We'd interview them. Robert McNamara, Chester Bowles, Byron White, Robert Kennedy. I can't remember the others. And then, of course, the President-elect now and then started announcing Cabinet appointees down in Palm Beach. That's where he announced Dean Rusk's appointment, Secretary of State.

STEWART: Did you cover the Inauguration?

KELSO: No, I didn't. No.

STEWART: Did you stay on after with Gannett?

KELSO: Oh, yes. Yes. But I just didn't cover that. I might have been tired or occupied in some other way.

STEWART: Were you at the White House with the Gannett papers after . . .

KELSO: Yes, I was.

STEWART: Until you went to Australia in 1962. Was it '62?

KELSO: Late '62, September of '62.

STEWART: What do you recall about the press conferences, the televised press conferences? Were they fairly well accepted at the beginning?

KELSO: Oh, extremely well. Yes. Well, he made news. He talked well, and the reporters were fascinated. And they went very well. Yes, I did. I left for

Australia in 1962, in September.

STEWART: Is there anything significant about your work down there? You were the press attache with [William C.] Battle, were you?

KELSO: Yes. John Kennedy got me interested really, at a fairly late age I suppose, in the federal government as the federal government, not as a newspaper reporter just writing stories that would get on page one, period. I had plenty of problems, I thought, doing that. My job wasn't to judge them, it was to report them. That's what I felt. And that's that. I tried to remain an objective reporter all the time I was covering the White House. If I'd been trying to feather my nest, it's obvious that I'd have done things a little bit differently. I took tests, mental and physical, and passed both, unbeknownst to any of the politicians. Then I went to Australia, on my own hook.

I remember when President Kennedy was assassinated. I can remember the great outpouring of sympathy throughout Australia. I'll never forget it. I can remember people driving by the American Embassy all day long, just to look at the American Embassy. It was some act of expression of sympathy. It was unforgettable. He was very popular in Australia, extremely so.

STEWART: Did they have a memorial Mass or service?

KELSO: Yes, they did. They had a memorial Mass. It was heavily attended. They had them all over Australia. They had one in Canberra, the capital. I think they sang our "Star Spangled Banner" off key. The fellow at the organ had a little trouble with it. Yes. It was new to him, apparently. The priest injected a few things of America into the service with the result that it did not go smoothly, but it added to the strength and the beauty and the dignity of the Mass because it was sincere.

STEWART: As far as covering the White House, did you have any real criticisms of Salinger's operation?

KELSO: No. I never did.

1 page covered