

Benjamin A. “Benny” Jacobson Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 04/06/1964
Administrative Information

Creator: Benjamin A. “Benny” Jacobson

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Biographical Note

Jacobson was an associate of John F. Kennedy [JFK] at Harvard University and in Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts. In this interview Jacobson discusses meeting JFK at Harvard University in 1936 and interactions with him at the school; visiting the Cape with the Kennedy family, 1937–1938; JFK’s plans for after his Harvard graduation; JFK’s 1946 congressional campaign; flying back with JFK from the 1960 Democratic National Convention; interactions with the Kennedy boys at Harvard; social interactions with JFK; visiting JFK in Washington, D.C.; JFK’s distrust of Fidel Castro; and Jacobson’s long relationship with JFK and the Kennedy family, among other issues.

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Benjamin Jacobson

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Oral History Interview

with

BENJAMIN JACOBSON

April 6, 1964
Cambridge, Massachusetts

By Jack Hynes

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HYNES: We're talking with Mr. Ben Jacobson of Cambridge. This is Jack Hynes, WHDH-TV in Boston. Ben, your remembrances of President Kennedy go way back into the 1930's. Could you tell us when you first met the President?

JACOBSON: I believe it was sometime in the early part of September of 1936. The front door of my place of business was closed. And all of a sudden I heard a rap on the door and a lot of noise out there. And I said, "I wonder who's out there. It must be young Joe Kennedy, Jr.," because he always did that. And in came young Joe Kennedy, Jr. and a thin boy.

HYNES: Where was this?

JACOBSON: This was in the Gold Coast Valetaria of Harvard Square, my place of business. And young Joe brought him in, disrupted the whole store. We had a lot of customers in there and he said, "Benny, I want you to meet my brother, Jack." I always had a great feeling for Joe. And I left the customers I was talking to

and I went over to say hello to Jack, who at that time was a little timid. And I think Jack at that time was a little shy and we said hello. And he told me, I think, he was going to live in Matthews Hall, one of the Harvard dormitories.

HYNES: He was a freshman at Harvard?

JACOBSON: He was a freshman at Harvard.

HYNES: What type of business did you have?

JACOBSON: We took care of the laundry and cleaning for the university, Harvard University. And my position was to go around and see the customers to see if they were satisfied customers. And after Jack and Joe had left, I told Jack I'd be up to see him in a week or so and if there was anything he needed, any help to get acclimated to his room and things like that, to be sure and call on me.

About a week later I dropped up to his room, and he had some books in front of him. I took a look at the books and quite a few of the books were poetry. I said to him, "Is that what you like, Jack?" He said, "Yes, I like poetry and history." And as I was talking to Jack, about five boys walked into the room. And one boy--in those days there was not so many Jewish boys at Harvard, not so many colored boys at Harvard, not too many Catholic boys at Harvard. And I see this group and I tried to distinguish them. And they sat down and Jack introduced them. He said, "You know Benny?" They used that word all the time at Harvard Square. And they got up and shook hands and, "Sit down, Benny. Take a chair." Now Jack was getting himself acclimated to being a freshman. And they sat down and I listened to the conversation. The conversation would be, one boy would ask Jack, "What would you do, Jack, if you had this problem home?", with reference to a father and mother not getting along or something like that, or financial things. And it seemed that Jack was accepted as the man, being a freshman, from these boys, for advice. And Jack would sit down and

tell them, in his opinion, what he thought of their situation and tell them, what he would do in their particular case. And I was flabbergasted to hear this, because being at the university so many years and going around to different rooms like I have been in the past, to bump into a situation like this.

So when the boys walked out I said to Jack, "Come on, let's go out and get a frappe." because Joe Kennedy, Jr. told me that Jack liked frappes. And, "Sure, Benny, let's go out." And we go out and go over to, I think it was St. Claire's, in those days, in the square, and we got a frappe. Jack liked good substantial food and I said to him, "Why don't you do this? Make it your business to come up to my house, Jack. My wife is a wonderful cook. Make it your business to come up to the house and have a few meals a week." He said, "Oh, it would be a burden on your wife." I said, "Oh, my wife loves it. She's always had the boys at the house and she likes this." So Jack would make it his business to come to my house, at least once a week, for a meal. And I'd always go outside and get the frappe because I knew Jack liked the frappe. And we'd serve it. And then Jack would always invite us down to the Cape. And my children, who are grown up today and married and have their children, they were very young in those days, and we used to take a ride down to the Cape--this was in 1937, '38--and go down and visit with the Kennedys. And they couldn't do enough for my wife, my two children and myself.

HYNES: This was at Hyannis Port?

JACOBSON: At Hyannis Port. So we used to go there frequently. One day Michael Grace, who was also a Harvard student, came from New York City and their business was the W. R. Grace Company in New York. Mike was a very religious boy. And he had two priests in from South America that he wanted to take down to the Cape, because the Kennedys and the Graces were very close. So he asked me if I would go down with the two priests and my family. And I said, "Gee, we'll be all jammed up in the car." And he said, "Oh, I'll sit in somebody's lap," and this and that. And we went down to the Cape. Mike Grace had a habit of taking his shoes off, when he went somewhere. I don't remember whether it was Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy], Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] or Jack that saw Mike's

shoes laying in the living room, and what happened to the shoes, I don't know till today. And when we were ready to leave to go into town, Mike wanted to take these two priests to the Copley Plaza Hotel, which is now the Sheraton, Mike had no shoes. So we went around and I grabbed hold of Teddy. They were youngsters. And Bobby and I said, "Get Mike's shoes." "I haven't got them." Nobody knew about the shoes. Well, to make a long story short, we got him a left slipper or a right slipper or whatever it was, it was wrong. And Mike got into the car and we went on to the Copley Plaza with the two priests. We got to the Copley Plaza and we had our meal.

Then we went home, and Mike said, "How am I going to get back now to Cambridge with these shoes?" And I said, "Oh, Mike, you can get back." So he said, "You take the priests to Brookline and I'll take a taxi." I said, "Have you got any money with you, Mike?" He said, "Not a cent." So I took out a dollar and a half and I gave it to him. And I said, "Now, you owe me a dollar and a half, and you owe me for the meal. You didn't pay for the meal, Mike. You had no money again." He said, "When I get back to Cambridge, I'll send a check to you." So I left Mike. The next morning Jack came in the store to see me and he said, "Benny, did you find the shoes?" I said, "No, I didn't." He said, "How did Mike get out?" I said, "You know how he got out, with the wrong slippers." Jack always liked to rib. I said, "Jack, did you take the shoes?" He said, "No, I never took the shoes, Benny." I said, "Did Bobby take them or Teddy?" He says, "No, I don't know who took the shoes." And that was the end of the shoe thing.

Jack used to come down to my place of business, oh, maybe twice a week, sit down and talk to me about various things. He was a great swimmer, Jack was, and I said to him, "Are you going out for football, Jack?" He said--Jack always felt he was a little light for football, but he used to play tag football for the house. They used to have house teams and Jack used to play. Jack was a little too light for football but he used to go in for swimming. Jack said to me, "My brother, Joe, wants to speak at some temple in Newton, Benny." This was about Spain because I think that Joe, Jr. had aspirations politically. And he said, "Can

you make arrangements at Temple Emmanuel?" He didn't mention Temple Emmanuel, he said, "the temple where you belong." I said, "I think I can, Jack." And I made arrangements at Temple Emmanuel for Joe Kennedy, Jr. to speak there. And Jack came along and went over to the temple, and there were about 400 people there. And Jack said to me, "You and I sit together, Benny, and let's criticize Joe if he says anything that isn't right. Let's bring up a criticism anyhow." I said, "If it isn't necessary, we won't." So we went there. He was supposed to speak for twenty minutes and he spoke for three-quarters of an hour. And everybody got very emotional from his speech, because he had gone to Spain and came home.

HYNES: And this was the time of the Civil War in Spain?

JACOBSON: That's right. And Joe and Jack came back to the house to have dinner at my house. And we sat down to eat and it was just impossible to eat. Everybody kept coming to the door for an autograph from Joe, Jr. And finally I went outside and I said, "For the love of Pete, wait for the man to get through eating, would you please!" And we finished our meal and Joe and Jack left for Cambridge.

HYNES: You say he used to drop in maybe once or twice a week?

JACOBSON: At least twice a week he would drop in the store.

HYNES: Did he ever indicate to you what he wanted to do, when he got out of Harvard, when he graduated?

JACOBSON: His great ambition was when he got out of Harvard to do writing, writing of books and things like that. Jack liked that type of work and as I said before, he was a great historian. I mean he used to say things to me that I was flabbergasted. I mean I'd go back to books that I had home and just look things up. And everything that he would say, that's exactly the way, just like he remembers them. ok.

HINES: Then he said he would like to be a writer.

JACOBSON: Yes, he would like to be a writer.

HINES: There was no indication that he would be interested in going into politics?

JACOBSON: None whatsoever. He thought like his brother, Joe, always thought that his brother, Joe, was going to be the politician in the family.

HINES: Being a writer, Jack, or the President, graduated from Harvard and you keep in contact with him?

JACOBSON: When Jack got through at Harvard, he went to Washington. That was in the summer of '41. He traveled through Europe and came back in '41 to remember. The Joe was in a position doing some work there before he joined the Navy. I'd be able to call him in Cambridge. It is matter of fact, as we know, that I think Bill Sutt had heard was there, the number that Jack got in a book was Bill Sutt's telephone number, which is my number, Kirkland 7-1211. Which I do not have now. I have a different number. But I do have the address some of the information has these things. Jack would call me on the phone and ask me a lot of questions. He would say, "What's going on?" and "What's the news?" And whatever a question I would answer as best I could.

MYERS: Did you see him before he went into the service?

JACOBSON: Yes, I did. I saw Jack before he went into the service. And he was very concerned about my son, Donald, who then was a boy, I think fifteen years old. Donald kept telling me that he didn't want to, he was at prep school then, Tilton Academy. And he kept telling me, "Daddy, I'm going to join." I thought it was just a boy talking, fifteen years old, just one of those great heroic things. But he said, "Benny, let Donald finish Tilton, and let him try to get into college." And he said, "I spoke to your boy and he told me he wants to become a paratrooper. It's a wonderful thing for Donald to do, but don't let him do anything. Let him get his education which is very important." Of course later on, a year later my son did join the paratroopers, the 101st Airborne. And Jack used to call me in reference to him and write me even when he was in the navy, "How's your boy doing? I knew, Benny, it was going to happen, because of the conversation I had with Donald."

MYERS: Did the President write to you from the South Pacific at any time?

JACOBSON: Yes, he did, sir. He wrote me about five or six letters.

MYERS: What were the gist of the letters he wrote? About the war?

JACOBSON: About the war, well, he just wrote that things were going along good and we got a few years more of the ship, but it'll be all over in a few months.

HYNES: Benny, after the war was over, when did you first learn that young Jack Kennedy was going to be a congressional candidate?

JACOBSON: I had a . . . There was a Congress fight in 1946, and I was very friendly with a gentleman by the name of Mike Neville who was a former mayor of Cambridge. And Mike Neville came in to see me and asked me to be with him, and I was very happy to be with him. And we had his picture in my place of business in the window. And suddenly one day, I can't remember what day it was, Jack Kennedy came along, drove up to my place of business and walked into the store and said, "Benny, I'm a candidate for Congress." There was a picture in the window, and he suggested to me that maybe I ought to go up and see Mike Neville first and declare myself that I couldn't be with him now that Jack was going to be Congressman. Of course, whatever Kennedy wanted to do, that was all right with me. So, I took his suggestion, I went up to see Mike Neville and he greeted me very graciously and I told him before I leave it won't be so graciously. And he said, "What's the matter, Benny?" And I told him that I was going to be with Jack Kennedy for Congress. He was a little disturbed, but he said, "Benny, if I had more people like you, I'd know where I stand." And out I went and then we took Mike Neville's picture down and put Jack's up.

HYNES: Did you campaign for him?

JACOBSON: Yes. That particular day he said, "On Wednesday, Benny, I want a platform built." It was right near my place of business. "And I want to speak to the people around her." So I said to him, "Well, gee, I wonder if I can get a carpenter to put up the platform." He said, "Oh, you can get one, Benny." So I said,

"I guess I can." So we went out, and I got hold of a couple of carpenters. And they said, "We cannot make this thing. You've got to be careful with this platform. We don't have the proper wood now. You want it in a hurry." So I said, "We'll be very careful with the platform." So Jack came along a day or two later and he went down there to speak to the people. And Jack got up there making his speech. And suddenly Michael Grace, who was very close to the Kennedys, got up to help Jack along and tilted the platform, and we all went off the platform. That was the end of that platform and the end of the speech there.

HYNES: Including the candidate himself?

JACOBSON: The candidate, all of us, went off the platform.

HYNES: What did he have to say?

JACOBSON: Just talking. I always said and I maintain that that's the day the New Frontier started.

HYNES: When the platform went.

JACOBSON: When the platform was built. I always maintained that. And Jack told about his aspirations and how he'd like to be a Congressman and he hoped he'd get the support of the people.

HYNES: In the campaign following that, then were you close to the President?

JACOBSON: Close to him all the time. If I didn't see Jack, Jack would always call me and ask me, "Benny, we took a poll here, we took a poll there, and what do you think?" And I'd ask him if he'd taken a poll of the other candidate. Sometimes he would have taken a poll of the other candidate and then we'd figure out the percentage, where Jack would stand. And I'd figure out with him, when he gave me the poll. I'd think that Jack was leading percentagewise.

HYNES: Did he ever mention to you, Benny, that he was going to run for the Presidency some day?

JACOBSON: Not then. He never mentioned it to me then. But he had aspirations for the top, and I could always tell by his tone of voice. I brought a son up, and my son today is thirty-nine. And while the President was living, he was 46, and there wasn't much of a difference there with bringing my son up and Jack Kennedy. And I always felt that I knew through experience what boys should do, being at Harvard University, which helped me an awful lot, too.

HYNES: [Were there times, Benny, when you were running the shop in Harvard Square and the President would come in, when he would get your goat?

JACOBSON: Get my goat?

HYNES: Needle you a little bit.

JACOBSON: He had a practice of needling me all the time.

HYNES: In what way?

JACOBSON: Well, he'd needle me, whatever the subject might have been, he'd go the other way and I'd give it to him back good and strong. He'd give me back good and strong and he'd go out laughing. He said, "Some day, Benny, I'm going to catch you." "What you do," I said, "I won't give any hair on my head." And I have no hair on my head. [Laughter]

HYNES: Benny, one of the great examples of the needling you were telling me earlier, came on the plane trip back from Los Angeles after the 1960 Convention. Would you tell us about this?

JACOBSON: There were about 60 of us coming back on the plane, as I remember. Maybe a few more. And I was invited to come back on the plane with Jack Kennedy, who was nominated then for President of the United States. And we were sitting in the rear of the plane and the nominee was sitting in front talking to Herbert Macdonald. And he sent word down for me to come up in front with him. And I immediately got up from my seat. I was sitting with Bob Murphy then who was then lieutenant governor, and walked back to the front of the plane. And the first thing he said to me, "Hi, LBJ! Did you see the book that you have ten paragraphs in, about the Kennedy family?" And I said, "No, I haven't. I never gave you permission to put anything in your book, and I don't know what right you have to do anything without consulting me."

HYNES: You said this to the President?

JACOBSON: To the President. "Well," he said, "you've got something there, Benny. You're not going to sell me or anything like that?" I said, "I don't know. Let's hold that in abeyance."

HYNES: And he called you LBJ?

JACOBSON: He called me LBJ. And I couldn't understand what the LBJ meant. And we got through with our talk and I went back to sit down with Bob Murphy, then the lieutenant governor. And I said to Bob, "What is this LBJ stuff?" Bob thought and thought and couldn't figure it out. About twenty minutes later he called me back to where he was sitting and he said, "Have you figured it out yet?" "Figured out what, Jack?" "The LBJ." I said, "No, I haven't. I haven't given it a thought." Because I wouldn't give in to him that I was doing all this thinking for twenty minutes and couldn't come up with it. And he said, "Hi, Little Benny Jacobson."

HYNES: Little Benny Jacobson.

JACOBSON: Little Benny Jacobson. When we landed at Logan Airport word got out that LBJ was on the plane. And we stepped off the plane and everybody said that LBJ is here. "Where's LBJ? Where's LBJ?" And they kept running around, running around, the entire plane. So somebody came up and said, "Well, there's LBJ walking out." I was walking out with Bob Murphy towards our car. "That's Benny Jacobson." "Yes, well, that's LBJ." And that's how that happened.

HYNES: Benny, going back to the store on Harvard Square, you knew all the Kennedy boys, Joe, Jack, Bobby, and Ted. Were they what you would call fastidious dressers? What stands out in your mind comparing the three boys?

JACOBSON: Well, I got to tell you a story about Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy, we had a birthday party for Michael Grace, who was transferring to Notre Dame. Michael Grace's birthday I wanted to run a little party for Michael Grace. So I invited him to my house and I invited Jack Kennedy and a few of his other friends. And they used to have these two colored boys that would always take care of them in those days. They called it the Cold Coast days. And I invited these two colored boys to manage all the friends of Michael Grace that were going to be at my home. And Jack walked in with a topcoat on. And the colored boy went to remove his topcoat and the sleeves and everything came right off. So everybody started to laugh. Jack didn't think there was anything funny about it at all. It was just one of those things. He turned around to me and he said, "You're my tailor."

HYNES: Did they run up a big bill in your tailor shop, Joe and Jack?

JACOBSON: Joe would run a pretty good bill, not Jack. Bobby, his bill was just an average bill. Teddy's was a little more. Teddy's was the same type of a bill as Joe, Jr. But Jack and Bobby, no. Their bill was very moderate. And I was always accused by Bobby after he left Harvard that I had ten shirts of his. Until this very day when he sees me he always says, "Where's my shirts, Benny?" And people that don't understand Bobby, don't realize that he is one of the greatest ribbers that we've had around.

HYNES: You took a lot of ribbing from the Kennedy boys, Joe, Jack, Bob and Ted, over the years.

JACOBSON: And I still take it from Teddy, I still take it from Teddy. As a matter of fact, I was invited to every Kennedy wedding, whether it was the girls or the boys. And when Teddy was getting married, Jack called me up and he said, "Did you get an invitation from Teddy? I said, "No, I didn't." He said, "You're mad, aren't you?" I said, "Of course, I'm very mad about it." And I didn't know whether Jack was ribbing me again, but I didn't realize it. And I was sitting one day in the Parker House with Lieutenant Governor Robert Murphy and a telephone call came at the Parker House. They called the State House and they told them I was down at the Parker House. And a telephone call came to me at the Parker House and they said it was long distance. I got on the phone and it was from Virginia, and Teddy got on the phone. He said, "Benny, we haven't received your acceptance to my wedding." I said, "You big bum you. How could you receive an acceptance, when I never got an invitation?" And these were the very words. I'll never forget. He said, "Benny, how can a Kennedy have a wedding without a Benny Jacobson?" And the next day in the mail I got an invitation with, I think, a dollar and fifty cents of stamps, special delivery, registered and everything. Of course, I went to Bronxville. That's where Teddy was married. While there in Bronxville, Mr. [Joseph P.] Kennedy, Sr., Bobby Kennedy, and Teddy were standing together and they called me over. Mr. Kennedy said to me this, "Benny, suppose Bobby Kennedy runs against Bob Murphy for governor. What are you going to do?" Jack said to me, "Answer the question." I said, "Mr. Kennedy, I have never

come to such a wonderful wedding." He said, "Answer the question." And I said, "Let me put it this way, Mr. Kennedy. If Bobby is going to be a candidate, let me answer the question then." Jack said, "Are you satisfied, Dad?" or whatever he called him. I don't remember the words. And Joe said, "Are you boys satisfied?" And none of them were satisfied, but we left it that way.

HYNES: What were the days at Hyannis Port like back in the late thirties, Benny?

JACOBSON: You'd go down to Hyannis Port and, of course, the boys were athletically inclined. I always said a Kennedy had three winds. An athlete usually has two winds, because they have that something extra that nobody else has, and that's where their success has been. And when I say third wind, I mean hard work. Everybody has accused the Kennedys of having a lot of money. Of course, they have a lot of money. Other people have lots of money. There are people just as rich as the Kennedys, but you've got to put the work into things and that's exactly what the Kennedys did, put the work into something and fight for what they want.

HYNES: Benny, was it surprising to you that the young, skinny, as you put it, Harvard student of 1936, grew up to be President of the United States?

JACOBSON: Of course, in my position right now, I could say yes, and I'd be a man that could say that Benny Jacobson could tell when a man is going to be President. But I always felt as I did in '56, when I made a prediction after we lost the Convention for Vice President the last minute. We had it and we lost it the last minute, which I think the timing is always good for a President, for the Kennedy family, who always, in my opinion, do things properly and the timing there was terrific because I did make that statement. I was mad, I admit, when we lost it, but I said, "In my opinion, in the next election of 1960, Jack Kennedy will go to the top."

HYNES: You mentioned this to a newspaper columnist?

JACOBSON: I mentioned this to a newspaper columnist and this newspaper is dated September 5, 1956, and I made the statement then and the statement is this. "Benny Jacobson, co-chairman of the Kennedy for Vice President Committee at the Democratic National Convention, was at the opening and swears that four years from now John will be in line for an even higher office, the top."

HYNES: You were out at the convention in '56?

JACOBSON: Yes, I was at Chicago.

HYNES: Did you tell the President then, Benny, that you thought four years later that he would be elected President?

JACOBSON: I told the President in 1952, when he ran for Senator. He called me up one day and he said, "Benny, we don't look too good in Framingham. Go out there and hit every door in Framingham. My sisters are going out there. I want you out there. Go out and hit every door, and if there's no one home, go back." I spent about four days in Framingham and his sisters did, too. And when I got through with Framingham I said to myself, "This is the next Senator of Massachusetts." People always said to me, "Benny, how can you ever say a thing like that?" But people did not realize that I traveled a lot with Jack, and I don't get emotional about people in the streets because a lot of people don't vote, but I could see the trend. Of course, there were many youngsters: Everybody thought that Jack wasn't married at that particular time and the young girls always thought they had a good shot at him. But I then predicted to Jack, "Jack, you're going to be the Senator and you're going to be the President." And he started to laugh.

HYNES: And he just laughed?

JACOBSON: He just laughed.

HYNES: Was he disappointed in 1956 when he missed the vice presidential nomination?

JACOBSON: The way things occurred, what happened, he was a little disappointed. But we all left the convention hall and went in and had a sandwich. And he said, "We have another fight coming." That was all that Jack Kennedy said.

HYNES: He indicated then that he was going to start fighting for 1960? [Benny, in knowing the President, when he was a student at Harvard, did you ever have the opportunity to go out with him socially? I know you had him at your house on many occasions, but did you ever take a trip with him?

JACOBSON: In the thirties Jack would be in New York, and he'd call me and ask me to come down to New York. And I'd go down there and he'd say, "Let's go out to the Grace house," and I'd say, "Okay." And I said, "What are you going to use, the Ford?" And he said, "Yes." So we'd get out on the road and I'd say, "Pull over and get some gas." He said, "Oh, we're loaded with gas, Benny, just loaded with gas. Couldn't put another drop in there." We'd get out to Queens Boulevard or Queens County and we'd run out of gas. And I'd turn around and say, "You're loaded with gas, huh, Jack?" And he'd laugh and laugh. And we'd have to push that car to the next. . . . I'd say to him, "Jack, let's get somebody to tow this. It'll only be a couple of dollars." "No, let's get some exercise. Let's push this car." And we'd have to push the car to the next gasoline station. Maybe it'd be a mile away and push and I'd say, "Jack, I can't keep pushing." "Well, you try and use some extra strength and don't get lazy." And that was my experience with Mr. Kennedy driving his Ford.]

HYNES: This was an old Ford he had when he was a student?

JACOBSON: When he was a student, yes, an old Ford.

HYNES: What other episodes took place in the Cold Coast Valateria, Benny, when the President was a student out there? What about the matter of football tickets for Harvard games? Did you have to keep a supply on hand for friends of the President coming into town, friends of students?

JACOBSON: Yes, the football players liked me fairly well. I used to go out to football practice. I was very close to Coach [Richard] Harlow and I was the only one allowed to secret practices and even into the room where they gave the signals out for the Saturday game. And I used to say I don't belong here. "You stay right here, Benny," Coach Harlow used to say to me. And, of course, I had so many friends and so many big shots that wanted these tickets. And everybody liked to sit on the fifty yard line. And the football players would bring them down to me and I'd give them out to very close people of mine.

HYNES: Did the President ever ask you to give him a couple of tickets?

JACOBSON: Oh, yes, the President would call up and say, "Benny, I'd like to sit on the fifty yard line." I'd say, "How many tickets do you need?" And he'd say, "Six, eight." I said, "Well, you're taking all of them." And he said, "Well, we need six or eight anyhow." And I'd always have them available.

HYNES: Benny, you visited the White House, I know, on several instances, but before the President was elected, when he was the United States Senator from Massachusetts, did you have occasion to visit him in Washington?

JACOBSON: Yes, I used to go there probably once every three or four months. But I do remember this incident distinctly. In 1959 my oldest grandchild, who is now fifteen, and he was four or five years younger then, wanted to go to Washington. And I took him along with my wife, and we went down to see the Senator. And when I went in there he introduced me to Joan Crawford and her husband. And while we were in there we all took pictures together. And the President then asked me, "Benny, you remain here because I want you to go somewhere with me." So Joan Crawford and her husband left and my wife and my grandchild went visiting around the White House and the Senate building. And I went with Jack to the White House to meet a man by the name of Castro, who was invited there by the President of the United States, then Dwight Eisenhower. And walking towards there Jack Kennedy said to me, "Benny, who we are going to see now will cost us much grief. And I don't just understand this, Benny, why this man is being invited to Washington, but that's the situation. But, believe me, Benny, this man is going to cost us plenty of grief." And we got there and Jack ran up the stairs to the security place. All the Senators were there and generals. And I was left downstairs, and I hollered up, "They wouldn't let me up because of the security." Jack had left first. And Jack hollered down some words and they let me go in there. And we stood there for about a half an hour and he came downstairs. And he said, "What did you think, Benny?" I said, "Jack, I think the same as you." He said, "Benny, I just don't understand this at all."

HYNES: He didn't like the idea of Castro being in Washington.

JACOBSON: He didn't like the idea of Castro being in Washington. He didn't like the idea because of Castro's background. Let me put it this way, being in Washington, Jack always liked everyone, but because he understood Castro. And other people tried to understand, but could not understand him, but Jack did.

HYNES: He knew he was going to be a source of trouble in the future?

JACOBSON: That's correct.

HYNES: And, Benny, it wasn't too many years later that he pointed this out to you again in the White House when he was President. Could you tell us about that episode?

JACOBSON: I went down to the White House to see the President, one of those new occasions when I went there. And we discussed that and he said, "What year was it, Benny, that I spoke about Castro?" And I said, "1959, Mr. President." He said, "Benny, this is nothing new to me. I'm not a bit surprised. Benny, that that's what we're confronted with." And he said, "You see this little red button?" It was on a telephone. I said, "Yes." He said, "Benny, I thought I'd have to push that button." And as I do remember that I was invited to the White House that particular day to meet the President. And his private secretary, Mrs. Lincoln, asked me to go into the room and stay there and he'd be surprised and get a great kick out of it. And I asked her if it was all right and she said, "You do as I say, Benny. You go into that room." And I was in the room all alone and I saw the helicopter land in the yard. And the first thing I saw coming in was a security man. And I figured well, this is the end of me, being in the President's office alone. But the Good God was with me, and the President seemed to overcome the security man and he walked in first and walked towards his desk. And whether he had eyes in the back of his head I don't know and he said, "Benny, how are you?" And I walked over to the President, and I was quite relieved because the security man then left.

HYNES: And this was when he brought up the matter of the red button on the phone?

JACOBSON: The red button.

HYNES: And he was referring then, of course, to the Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba?

JACOBSON: Correct, sir. And there was another thing I asked him. I said, "Mr. President, why are the . . . In his office he had a rug and then there was marble going out towards the yard and there were two holes in this marble. And I said to him, "Mr. President, why are these two holes here?" He said, "Benny, you're the second man that has asked that question since I've been President. It's a good question. When Dwight Eisenhower was President he used to put his golf shoes on at his desk and after he stepped off the rug he hit these things and made this impression, made these two holes there."

HYNES: Benny, from September 1936 to November 1963 is a long time, twenty-seven years, that you knew the President. Is there any one thing or perhaps several things that stand out in your mind over that span of years about John F. Kennedy?

JACOBSON: John F. Kennedy lived up to every expectation that I knew he was going to and that's this: He was humane, he put his shoe on the other fellow's foot. In this way he could analyze a situation. When it came to human beings, he wasn't fast in making a decision. He thought the thing over very carefully, and after he made his decision almost 100 percent he was right.

HYNES: He was very close, Benny, to people who knew him years back before he entered politics and he maintained this friendship, as is brought up in your case, all through the years. And you're a man who has never held political office, but you've helped the President in all his campaigns--and I imagine you helped Senator Kennedy, Edward Kennedy, in his campaigns, too?

JACOBSON: I certainly have. I'm sixty-two years old now and I do hope the day will come. Because that's one thing Jack always asked me when I'd speak to him, "How's Teddy doing? How's Teddy doing? How's Teddy doing?" I would always have to give him the proper answer because Teddy always does the right thing. And I do know the day is coming when our Teddy will hold the office that his brother held.

HYNES:

We've been talking with Mr. Ben Jacobson of Cambridge. This is Jack Hynes of WHDH-TV in Boston.