

Mary L. McCarthy Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 7/13/1977
Administrative Information

Creator: Mary L. McCarthy
Interviewer: Sheldon Stern
Date of Interview: July 13, 1977
Place of Interview: Hyannisport, MA
Length: 79 pages

Biographical Note

McCarthy, Mary Louise, (1928-2009) was the niece of Ambassador Joseph P. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy (daughter of Loretta Kennedy, Joseph P. Kennedy's sister) and first cousin to President John F. Kennedy. McCarthy earned her bachelor's degree from Barry College (University) in 1951 in Miami and became an educator. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's relationship with his family members, differences in personalities between the Kennedy brothers, and family time spent in Hyannisport and Palm Beach, among other topics.

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Suggested Citation

Mary L. McCarthy, recorded interview by Sheldon Stern, July 13, 1977, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Oral History Interview

Of

Mary L. McCarthy

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Mary L. McCarthy– JFK #2
Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	First time meeting cousins John F. Kennedy [JFK] and Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. [JPK, Jr.]
5	JFK's love of sailing
6	Kennedy family's competitive nature
8	JFK's relationships with his siblings
11	Rose Kennedy's organizational skills
16	JFK's relationship with his parents
20	Joseph Kennedy's appointment as Ambassador
24	McCarthy's family's role in JFK's campaigns
31	1960 Presidential Inauguration
41	Soup story
44	Family visits to Palm Beach
48	JFK's relationship with his grandfather, John Francis Fitzgerald
52, 70	Death of JPK, Jr.
55	Differences in personalities between JFK, JPK Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy , and Edward M. Kennedy
74	Bomb threats the family received

Oral History Interview

With

MARY L. McCARTHY

July 13, 1977
Hyannisport, Massachusetts

By Sheldon Stern

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STERN: How far back are we going?

McCARTHY: Oh, let me see. Well, as I said on the other tape, seven, was the first time I was aware of my big cousins and Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.] and Jack [John F. Kennedy] really seemed like, you know, like a duo. They were, I suppose, about in their last years of high school when I met them. I suppose they were, like seventeen and eighteen and sixteen, and seventeen, something like that. Well, the first time that I came to Hyannisport, mother had arranged with Uncle Joe--he thought it would be good for all of us to begin to mix with our cousins--so mother took me to the Esplanade and Uncle Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] and Dave--I can't remember Dave's last name; he was the chauffeur during those years--he picked us up and I got in the car with my little blue suitcase and kissed mommy goodbye and off we went to,

[-1-]

on this great, long drive down here, which was pretty long at the time.

STERN: This was from Winthrop?

McCARTHY: This was from Winthrop, yes, and it was, you know, there were no highways then; you came through every little town on the Cape. It

took forever, and Uncle Joe sat in the front and listened to Bo Carter and all the newsmen as we came along and chatted with Dave. And I fell asleep intermittently and woke up and everything else and then hung out on the window of the car to watch as we went through. Then when we got there, we sent.... The butler--I can't remember which one it was--came out to meet us on the front porch and Aunt Rose [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy], being him. The butler took the luggage and Uncle Joe and Aunt Rose greeted one another, and then this enormous crowd of young people followed out the door and I was simply, simply devastated. I hung on to Uncle Joe's leg and wanted to go in the house. That was it, too much for me. I remember how tall Joe

[-2-]

and Jack seemed; they seemed just massive and it was sort of.... And they all seemed so tanned. I spent the summer in the water, too, outdoors in Winthrop--it's on the ocean, also--but I was just freckled or burnt, and they all seemed wonderfully outdoorsy looking.

STERN: Was this the first time you actually met them?

McCARTHY: Yes. As far as--not Uncle Joe, he visited us all the time in Winthrop--but the children, yes, I think. But, of course, I had met Aunt Rose before, but I had never seen all the children en masse and it just seemed so devastating and the only way they could finally introduce me to them all is to put them up the stairs, the front stairs in the Hyannisport house right in the central hall, so they were all mounted on the stairs and that was the easiest way. It just seemed a mountain of children and I wanted to go home. [Laughter]

STERN: These weren't all Kennedy children, actually there probably were some other additional

[-3-]

relatives?

McCARTHY: I think later on, yes, when I was able to figure faces out, that some of the others had been brought in. I think that Joey Gargan [Joseph F. Gargan] was there and Dave. The chauffeur's two little girls had come in by way of the kitchen and had joined the crowd. There were an awful lot of extra ones during the summers that followed. All of us, you know, as I mentioned before, and I'm sure many other have mentioned, we were brought down in contingent groups. But my first meeting with them was just overwhelming because there were so many and where I was an only child, it just was devastating; I just wanted to go right home to mommy and daddy. I didn't want to stay down here at all and then I was given in Jean's [Jean Kennedy Smith] care, of course. You were always paired off with whoever was closest in age...

STERN: I see.

McCARTHY: So, I can't remember much about the first few days but then I became aware, eventually, that

[-4-]

the older children never did anything at the same time we did except, once in a while, eat, because Aunt Rose had us on different schedules, time schedules, and everybody did things at different times. Then I realized that the main love of Joe and Jack seemed to be the ocean. They were always sailing.

STERN: Together, generally?

McCARTHY: Usually, together, yes. I can't remember the name of the boat; I remember the one after Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] came was the One More, but I think the other one was the Eight of Us and they sailed a great deal. They were terribly competitive and they were always in white and they just shone against the hull of the boat, you know. Sometimes we'd go down to the [Inaudible] and see them as they came in. Joe was always seething if they had lost; he was always absolutely fanatical about who had cut them off at the last buoy, you know, who had taken their wind or something, and I remember it seemed to me that Jack was not as competitive...

STERN: Really.

[-5-]

McCARTHY: ...but a little concerned that Uncle Joe would be annoyed with the loss. Even if they had come in second or third they were a little distressed; they wanted to be first.

STERN: There were many, many stories that have come out of that period about the intensive competition...

McCARTHY: Yes.

STERN: ...in sports and various other things, did you perceive any competition between the brothers themselves?

McCARTHY: Well, I've read some books since that say there was a great deal of it. I never particularly noticed it. I'm sure there were, there was. And also, I wasn't with them all year. I don't know what they were doing in October. Maybe in football they were killing one another or something. But, I don't know, I noticed more the unity than the competitiveness, but I would think that a natural family rivalry in any family would bring out the competitiveness with the two years difference. Joe

was so much stronger than Jack. He was a perfectly made young man and he was terribly strong and rugged where Jack

[-6-]

sometimes was not as strong; he had a number of childhood illnesses and difficulties that made him not quite able to, for instance, physically take on his brother, so there doesn't...

STERN: Was there any idea at this point.... Do you happen to remember any mention at all of back problems, did he have any?

McCARTHY: No, I don't remember during our early years. You know, I went there every summer from seven to sixteen and I don't remember a lot of it; I know he had some difficulty--was it at Groton--that he began to have some real difficulties then, but I don't recall any of it during the summer, showing up, I mean I don't remember him going in to rest a great deal of the time or anything. Everybody went, and I found when we were older, too, that there was no mercy when girls had passed that certain stage and were having our monthly periods; there was really no sympathy given to us at all. We couldn't even have an afternoon of feeling rotten, you know, it wasn't allowed much. One time I finally put my foot down at fifteen and felt so terrible and I was supposed to enter some swim competition and I said "No! Don't. It's that time. I feel terrible and I don't care if I'm a Kennedy, I'm not doing it." But, usually, unless you were really sick, and if you were sickly you got over it very quickly, you didn't have very much sympathy at being sick. I guess that's why, now, Bobby's [Robert F. Kennedy] children, you know, they break a leg, they break a foot, an arm, a crack on the head, and two days later they're back doing whatever they were doing before, which is a little rugged but that seems to be following an old army tradition or something.

STERN: Do you have any recollections of Jack's relationship with any of his other siblings such as Kathleen [Kathleen Kennedy Hartigan]?

McCARTHY: Kathleen, I think, was his--well, I don't know though, both Joe and Jack were, I think, awfully close to Kathleen, to Kick. She was such a delightful girl; she was quicksilver and she moved quickly, she was beautiful to look at--lovely

[-8-]

blond hair. She and Jack, and Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] a little bit, were the only ones who had Uncle Joe's coloring; everybody else had Aunt Rose's coloring. I don't know, I think it make her kind of fascinating. She was the only tiny one, too, where the other girls were growing so tall and lanky so quickly. And I really think that she did more to start the brothers dating and to.... You know, she would bring in glorious-looking classmates or bring them back for the inspection of her two handsome brothers.

STERN: Did you ever see her tease them about that?

McCARTHY: Oh constantly. It was nonstop; she was just terrible. I used to think that she probably spent half the night thinking up things to do to drive the two older brothers...

STERN: Can you think of any examples?

McCARTHY: ...to madness. Well, there was.... I don't know if Joe had, whether it was a convertible or a flivver or something that the both of them used--I think it had a rumble seat--and she was

[-9-]

always accusing them of finding the bobby pins and hairpins in it that must have belonged to a number of girls that she had not lined up for them. And she wanted to know, on the late dates, who they were taking home or who were they squiring and why were the bobby pins falling out of the hair; what was going on! And, you know, they loved it, it was all good natured and it was all delightful; they were wonderful with one another. I remember, after about the third or fourth summer, beginning to have a terrible longing to have brothers and sisters because I saw how much fun it could be together. You know, the competition was only a little part of it; the other was the teasing and the doing things together, you know, go taking the sisters out to the dances, which was awfully sweet of them because Aunt Rose always insisted that Rosemary [Rosemary Kennedy] and Eunice and Kathleen and Pat [Patricia Kennedy Lawford] all be escorted by the brothers. They wouldn't have to dance with them all night but at least dance two or three times with each of the sisters

[-10-]

until the sisters got going and got young swains of their own, and the boys were awfully good about that. They'd bring them, you know.... And Aunt Rose, she was a fantastic major-domo, as I mentioned on the other tape, and she had everything so organized. Everything went smoothly because.... I'm sure it would have been mass chaos when you have fifteen or sixteen young people from the age of seven to twenty-one or twenty-two around the house all day it would have been awful if she didn't have it all set up nicely.

STERN: Yes, she's a very organized woman, you can see that with the file cards, for example.

McCARTHY: Oh yes, with all the measles and the chickenpox and the shots of everybody's, yes.

STERN: How about any of Jack's other interests. During the summers did you see anything other than sports and sailing?

McCARTHY: I don't particularly remember it, I mean, maybe he had rock collections or model collections or something, but I don't remember it, not that it comes back to me.

[-11-]

STERN: Do you have any kinds of personal contact of the type like the story of the tennis lessons with Bobby, is there anything like that?

McCARTHY: No, well, the only thing, it was quite a lot later and it had nothing to do with Hyannisport. He had undergone some difficulties with the back--I think it was pre-the PT 109 incident--but something had gone haywire with his back and mother kept in contact with the boys, with all of them, for a long time but then she sort of stayed with the boys later on and their thank you notes were always so warm and loving that the response was good and so she always responded right back to them. I remember her getting special permission to go into the, I think it was the Charlestown Naval Hospital or something like that, and we bought him a huge cake, that he was just delighted because nobody had been allowed in there except his mother and his father and the doctors and then suddenly arrives Aunt Loretta [Loretta Kennedy Connelly]

[-12-]

with cousin Mary Lou in tow and we're there for about an hour's visit while he had huge glasses of milk and huge pieces of chocolate cake and he was just...

STERN: Yes, he apparently had a great appetite for that sort of thing.

McCARTHY: ...oh yes, he loved sweets. Well, I think they got that from their daddy. Uncle Joe loved them and Aunt Rose always kept him away from them to keep his fine physique and he suffered a great deal because he couldn't have as much as...

STERN: Was this incident in the naval hospital after he had the war injury or...?

McCARTHY: I don't think so, I think it must have been something before; I think the back was acting up before the war injury, but I'm not absolutely sure. It was before we moved to Florida and, of course, the war years were in there so I don't know which time it was. But I remember the comparison then years later when he was coming from that awful time that he had had after he had married Jacqueline [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], and then he was very down and depressed and things were

[-13-]

kind of bad with the recover of the back. It seemed to me that I had read the story that she had had Grace Kelly [Grace Patricia Kelly, Princess of Monaco] come in at the time and--I don't know whether she was married to the prince or not--but that she had come in and dressed as a little nurse and had brought in the pills and the water and what not and, amidst great laughter and gaiety. So I think those that have loved Jack through the years when he's been down or had a bad time have always found that that lovely sense of humor was down bubbling underneath and that if you could just surprise him with something that he didn't expect, he would just rise right up to the occasion. He'd be delightful afterwards.

STERN: Can you think of any examples of his sense of humor you saw him do?

McCARTHY: Well, the only other one, and I also mentioned it before, was when he was giving one of his early speeches in his towel. You know, most people wouldn't. He had been writing his early speech and it was here in Hyannisport and I suppose it was before he started Congress and he was all pleased with it and he had come in

[-14-]

from bathing. And usually the boys showered downstairs and just put on a towel and came upstairs to their rooms and changed, if they hadn't had sense enough to bring the things downstairs--Aunt Rose preferred everybody change downstairs but sometimes they marched around in towels. And his sisters were all there and they were kind of teasing him and giving him a hard time about, you know, who wants you for a congressman. And so he said, "Listen, I have a marvelous speech that will overwhelm you with its intelligence." So he gave a speech, like Caesar, in his towel amid all of us with catcalls and, you know, anybody that skinny is never going to be elected for anything, because he was just bones at the time, so we gave him a very hard time and he loved it. He just howled and said, "Pay no attention to the rabble and the riff-raff, and I will achieve no matter what." So that was kind of fun. Actually, I didn't see him much after that; we moved south and I just didn't see him until the inauguration so there was a lot of years in between.

[-15-]

STERN: Can you recall any specifics about his relation with his parents during the years you were coming to Hyannisport, particularly the individual relationships with his mother and father and how they got along?

McCARTHY: After the boys got tall, it got kind of funny because Aunt Rose was always such a petite little thing and yet was so positive, was such a positive woman, and she was always instructing, she was always giving corrections and instructions; it didn't matter whether they were six foot three or, it didn't matter in the slightest; still doesn't. She corrects anybody in the family that she loves: "You should do this," or "This is what you should do." And she still does this to all of us and we love it. [Interruption] Oh, I've lost it. What was the question?

STERN: You were talking about Jack's relationship with his parents.

McCARTHY: Oh, his mother was forever telling both he and Bobby to tuck things in; shirts were usually out of it in the back or maybe a cuff of one shirt

[-16-]

would be, you know, one side would be out beyond the jacket and the other side would be in and she would be straightening them out while they were doing something either going on a date or something else. And they took it with a lot of laughter, you know, "Oh mother, for heaven's sake," but they'd be laughing. And she would constantly be chasing behind them, making sure that they were civilized looking to go out and face the world because, he really, during those days, he really liked messy clothes, at least at home, you know, cut-down pants or just an old army shirt or something that wasn't gloriously wonderful. So she was always checking both he and Bobby to make sure that they were neat, where Joe seemed to be a little bit more of a clothes horse; he always looked fabulous when he was going out. I think he took a little more time. Is that the question? I'm sorry, I can't remember all of it.

STERN: Oh that's all right.

McCARTHY: And then Uncle Joe--oh, his relationship with his dad; you don't want to say worship but it was awfully close to it. Everything was measured by how their father would judge it.

STERN: I see.

McCARTHY: I think a great deal of that came from their mother. When we would talk during the mealtime, she would say, "Well, if you think your father would like that," or, "If you think that would please dad, then go ahead and do it; however, I would

[-17-]

think it over." He was a very hard judge; he was an adoring father, he loved all his children, but he demanded so much from them that each one measured everything according to what Joe, Sr. would, you know, say about it later on. And on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, we found out, [Laughter] because between Monday...

STERN: Was there a real change of atmosphere when he came home?

McCARTHY: Oh yes, always. Always a change in atmosphere, no tension but excitement, thrill that he was coming home and he was bringing so

much news of the world to the household. He was such a vital man, such an intelligent man and the children always had questions. And sometimes before they had questions he had so many answers or so many tales that it was just thrilling. The whole week was geared to when Uncle Joe would come.

STERN: They spent, he obviously spend a great deal of time talking about public affairs and his experiences, I suppose, on the Securities and Exchange Commission.

McCARTHY: Yes. Nothing that shouldn't be told to a family but I think there were.... I know my mother and father.... Daddy worked for Standard Oil during the war and there were many times that I was told that this was for in the house; it's never to leave the house. It's our business, it's family business, or it's government business, or it's shipping business; keep quiet, and I learned never to tell anything out of the house.

[-18-]

Daddy had a poster up and it was, "Loose lips sink ships," which--they were around all during WWII and I think there was pretty much the same feeling in the Kennedy household. Things that Uncle Joe said around his own dinner table were for the family and those of us cousins that were there, we were family and also related by blood on one side and marriage on the other, but, you know, just keep quiet. If you wanted to tell you mother and dad, yes, but they learned to keep quiet, too. Nothing ever went out that wasn't supposed to go out.

STERN: Then a tremendous sense of family identity, and unity...

McCARTHY: Always, yes. They were very close.

STERN: Did you ever perceive any specifically political ambitions--I mean did you hear a lot of stories that Joe, Sr., very early on, intended to goad the boys in the sense of political ambition?

McCARTHY: Well, they always told them that they would never have to worry about money the rest of their lives. That he had made the money and was making the money and that was his goal and he had achieved that. And through that money he was giving them the most marvelous of educations and that then they each had to seek a goal in which they would succeed in whatever way they wanted and he did want one or two of them in politics and mainly he wanted Joe, Jr. But because of the boys being so close in age and intelligence, Jack went

[-19-]

along with each of these things; it was better to send two sons to London than one son or, you know, two sons to Spain than one son, so both boys got the same education and followed

along. When they were sent to Laski [Harold Joseph Laski], that was an unheard of thing, but, the man was a genius in economics and he wanted his boys to have that. When there was a chance to meet someone of importance from any phase of a ruling class, be it a democracy, or a royal family or whoever it would be, and there was an opportunity through Uncle Joe's position to see that his children went, he would send them. I think, yes, he intended right along that Joe, Jr. would eventually.... I don't know whether he aimed for the presidency, but I think possibly. I would think he saw no reason why his boy couldn't do it with the background that he had and education that he was being given, yes.

STERN: Do you have any recollections, specifically, of his appointment as ambassador and how that hit the family?

McCARTHY: Oh yes. It was thrilling. Of course, I think all

[-20-]

branches of the family--I don't know, I can't speak for all the Fitzgeralds--but I know that the Burkes' and Connellys', we were all for Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] too. Uncle Joe wrote a book on *I'm For Roosevelt* and we all backed FDR's policies during those days and we knew Uncle Joe was very much for him and had done a great deal for him during many of the campaigns and.... The phone rang one day and--Uncle Joe frequently called momma when he was in the Boston area--and he said, "Loretta, I think that there's a very good chance I will be appointed the ambassador of the Court of St. James." And mother was thrilled and said, "Oh Joe, I'll start praying and when it comes through, will you or Rose call me?" And he said, "We certainly will." And about a week later, he called and it had come through; Franklin Roosevelt had decided he would be excellent. We were all thrilled; there were phone calls back and forth between the families and everybody was very "up" for it and then Aunt Rose was on the phone asking mom to get as much genealogy as she could get from background material. Mother sent word

[-21-]

to Ireland to get things, so, it was a thrilling time. We particularly got such a kick out of the newspapers at the time that went on about the fact that Uncle Joe, during the presentation, was not going to wear the knickers and the long, silk stockings and everybody got a kick out of that. At the time, I remember, mother laughed and said, "I don't know why Joe isn't going to do it; he has wonderful legs." But he just felt that that wasn't natural to him; he would be delighted to wear a morning suit but he was not going to wear, you know, the other, so it was accepted very graciously by the king and queen....

KERRY: Will you tell about the send-off from East Boston?

McCARTHY: Oh yes, was that for the ambassadorship, was it?

KERRY: Yes.

McCARTHY: Do you want to tell about it?

KERRY: No, no; you tell.

McCARTHY: At one point Uncle Joe phoned and said, "Loretta, do you remember if there are any people in East Boston that remembered papa?" Papa being P. J. Kennedy [Patrick Joseph Kennedy]. Momma said, "I'm sure

[-22-]

there are dear." So he said, "Well, I think it would be kind of nice if perhaps they came to the airport and saw us off as we leave. Would you make a few phone calls?" Well, I think mother made about eight hundred phone calls during that next two weeks and that night, my dad and Mr. John Canaan and Mr. Eddie Casey and some of the other friends from Winthrop went out to the airport and they could hardly get through. The crowd was so big and took up.... Of course, it was little Logan [Logan International Airport] then; it was a tiny little bitsy thing, you know, much tinier than it is now, but, still, it was kind of delightful to Joe to look around and see that these friends of his dad's, that had loved and admired P.J., were toasting his son going off. You know, it was a wonderful thing for an Irishman to be appointed--and Irish-catholic--to be appointed to the Court of St. James. And he was terribly thrilled and he said, he sent a telegram or a cable to mother later on and said, "Loretta, if I'm running for anything else or if I'm

[-23-]

going for anything else, I'll just have you make a few phone calls and I'm sure it will come through." [Laughter]

STERN: That reminds me of another point. You mentioned that he had called your mother in '46 when Jack's congressional campaign was beginning.

McCARTHY: Oh yes.

STERN: If you could amplify on that, I think that would be very interesting.

McCARTHY: Well, of course, we were in Florida then and it was very hard for mother to do anything from that distance, but, of course, she's a marvelous correspondent, so she wrote to a lot of the ladies and she told them that Jack was home and, as they probably knew, was a war hero and was her god-son--she was always very proud of the fact that he was the god-son as well as the nephew--and that he was considering running for Congress and that he would be very good,

and if they all wanted to campaign, she would just be delighted about it. We were just starting, the phone call brigade all started through the suburbs in Newton and Waban and

[-24-]

Winthrop and, I don't know, some folks in Revere and East Boston and they began to call and I'm sure that many sources were doing things, but that was mother's little contribution to getting him started. We have friends that wrote to her before her death and they said that they had campaigned for him for every single thing that he ran for and then for Bobby when he started later on and then for Teddy later on. You know, and they were not the known ones, they're not ones that are put down as campaign workers. They're friends of the families that have known three generations--all of our family line--and simply say, "Oh, another one, fine," and just go out and do something. [Laughter] So that's kind of lovely.

STERN: Did your family, you particular family, have any role in any of the later campaigns?

McCARTHY: Well, in the Presidential one, in Florida, we manned one of the--what was it, sweetheart?

KERRY: Campaign offices.

McCARTHY: Campaign offices. Yes, that was Kerry's first touch of politics. What age were you, sweetheart?

[-25-]

KERRY: About six or seven.

STERN: I don't recall, did he carry Florida?

KERRY: Yes, he did. *[Nixon carried Florida in 1960]

McCARTHY: Of course. [Laughter]

KERRY: With my mother and grandmother, after all! [Laughter] Yes, he did.

McCARTHY: Of course, they always say the South is Democratic, but Republicanism was beginning to...

STERN: That's right.

McCARTHY: ...to come up quite strongly then and I remember mother had never done anything open like that and she really was of an age--she really

didn't want to, but she loved Jack so, she'd do anything for him, and so she was assigned from ten to twelve every morning in the campaign office and would answer phones and give out stickers and anybody that would come in she would say, "He's simply wonderful and you really need him as the President. Why don't you just put this right on the car," and they did. She was so charming and so sweet.

STERN: Did you have a chance to see him when he came down to campaign in Florida?

McCARTHY: We saw him when--in Herning Park when he gave the speech in Jacksonville,

[-26-]

Florida. Mother and daddy were on the podium with him--or actually it was like a summer house--that he spoke from in the middle of the park and they were with him and then we were in about the third or fourth row. But then it was very uncomfortable. I guess the governor of Florida, during that time, was concerned about protection as so often is the case, and they overdid the protection. Everybody that was there that we could tell.... We came up from St. Augustine in a caravan of twenty cars with every single person loving him and having worked for him like mad and nothing but good feelings towards him, and, I think, many of the other Democratic groups from the surrounding towns had done the same thing. And they had these state troopers that were, you know, the nearest thing to fascists or Nazis that I've ever seen in my life. We were supposed to drive out to the airport with him afterwards to bid him farewell and, as we started to rise from the seats--well,

[-27-]

everybody was standing and clapping after he made his speech--these awful men came on every side of him and they grabbed my mother and knocked my poor father, and they grabbed momma--and she's a little delicate, tiny thing like Aunt Rose--and they just whisked her off and the President and his driver and about three other people in the party and it caused just mass chaos. People were falling and being pushed, and chairs were being pushed and...

STERN: Was there any kind of...

McCARTHY: ...there was no violence! There was nothing except caused by these awful troopers.

STERN: They over-reacted.

McCARTHY: To nothing! They were reacting from whatever was in their head because nothing was coming from the audience....

KERRY: There was a natural surge of the people wanting to get closer to him

but nothing in the way of a threatening action, and we

[-28-]

were up close, being stomped on by the policemen more than the crowd.

McCARTHY: Oh yes! The crowd were very kind to one another. We had a darling friend by the name of John Vasaggi that I had... Because Matt was protecting Kerry, my husband and I said, "Take Kerry and be careful," because we were being just literally swept as if you were in the ocean and waves came up and surges of people were being pushed and swept into too small an area. My husband and Kerry were just swept out of the way and, of course, I'm short and I can't fight a crowd very well, and I had the baby. I saw John coming by and I handed John Vasaggi--he was the head of the Democratic committee--the baby and he went and I was pushed down and then finally some very kind women kind of pulled me to my feet so that others wouldn't come on me and we all finally met, later on, terribly disheveled and very upset, and my father was

[-29-]

hysterical because mother was missing. You know, there was this great crowd and people crying, and it was just a mess. Later on, when we met again, daddy said, "We'd better go to the George Washington Hotel because I told mother if there was any difficulty we would meet there." Meanwhile, mother had been put in the car with Jack and was whisking toward the airport and was furious!

STERN: She wasn't supposed to be going, I gather.

McCARTHY: Well, she was supposed to be going with her whole family and, as far as she knew, her entire family were wiped out. So when we got there, when we got to the lobby of the hotel, there was a radio message from the President's car-- or the President-to-be's car--that said that he was awfully sorry that we'd all had perfectly terrible time--I mean presumed--and that Aunt Loretta was safe and was with the FBI at the airport and that she would be soon, be sent back to the George Washington Hotel. So poor old mother came back and she had had the cutest little hat on, with a large brim, and when she came the whole front was dented in and down

[-30-]

and she said, "Well, I love him, but I'm really very angry with him and I don't know whether I want to talk to him for the next month. The first thing he said is, 'Well Aunt Loretta, how is everything?' and I said, Well, Jack, dear, terrible! I don't know where the family are!" [Laughter] Anyhow, that was our meeting in a crowd, so I never wanted to get in a political crowd after that. That kind of cooled us for it.

STERN: Did you have any contacts after he was elected? Did you go to the inauguration?

McCARTHY: We went to the inauguration--mother and dad and my husband, Matt, and I. And we had a lovely time. We had gotten the convent--there was

the St. Joseph Convent in St. Augustine, who were supposed to stay very neutral during that time--religious, never got involved in the campaigns. But the nuns were very cute. They were all mad for him and wanted him to win and they all had been allowed to have the vote. They had large bibs during that time and, under the bib, they had "Vote for Kennedy" on them and they would lift up these bibs whenever they'd walk downtown with the thing, pretend it was very warm and that they

[-31-]

were fanning themselves, and, you know, it was constant campaigning. Sister Patrick Therese had had Kevin for kindergarten and she had a lot of miraculous medals and Sacred Heart medals and I don't know what all else--all kinds of religious items--that she wanted the President to have, so she put them in my purse just before we flew off and I said, "Sister, I don't know if I can give him all this stuff. He probably has a million of them anyhow." She said, "No, you have to promise me that on the day he's inaugurated you give him these medals." And I said that "Well, I would do the very best I can." So after we got there--and there were many pre-inaugural things planned, but the day of the inauguration we each got a telegram that said that they were having a family reception between the inauguration ceremonies, the parade and the dances that night, so to come in, sort of, during the parade time and told us which gate to come in and that our drivers were to show these to the men at the gate and that we could come through because it was strictly a family reception. So we got in there and Jack was greeting Cathy and Jack [Jack Fitzgerald].

[-32-]

Young Jack, at the time, young John Fitzgerald, I think had just become a priest or he was either just finishing college or just becoming a priest and the President had not seen him, evidently, in some years and was amazed at how he had grown up so there was much greeting there and mother could hardly contain herself with joy when she saw him and she wanted to run right up, but she was trying to wait and let the Fitzgeralds have their turn and then as soon as they turned away and Jack started to walk towards us and he looked so gorgeous! He had grown so, really; he had gained weight and had gotten so strong looking. He was always so vulnerable looking as a young man and now he was so big and strong and gorgeous. Mother called out, "Oh Jack!" And he kind of took three big steps towards her and said, "Aunt Loretta!" and picked her up and swung around with her. And she was crying and laughing and doing everything all at once and she was so thrilled and daddy and Matt and I were standing and waiting to speak to him and then he shook hands with daddy and said, "Uncle George, wonderful that you're here!" Then he said....

[-33-]

then we introduced my husband and said, "Matt, how nice that you could come." And then he said, "Oh my little cousin all grown up!" And I gave him a hug and a kiss and I had the medals in my hand and I put them in his jacket pocket and the next thing I knew the draperies all moved and these secret service men or whoever the heck they were, all came out at me and I kind of shrieked. And he laughed and said, "Ah" and he dug into his pocket and he found one of the miraculous medals and then he laughed and he said, "Oh, I'm thoroughly blessed," and he put it back in and said, "No, it's all right; it's all right." And I shook for about an hour afterwards because I had no idea that they were.... I knew they were in the building, I just didn't know they were behind the draperies, so that was a very unnerving thing. When I got back to St. Augustine I said to Sister Patrick Therese, "I don't appreciate you doing that to me. I almost got arrested." [Laughter] So that was really the last time I saw him.

STERN: You never went to the White House while he was President?

McCARTHY: No. It was a glorious day. It was just

[-34-]

wonderful. It was so exciting and beautiful. Of course, he corresponded with us, you know, we wrote but I never saw him again.

[END TAPE 1]

[BEGIN TAPE 2]

STERN: I think that the other question that I wanted to ask you is a more difficult one. Let me give you a little background on why and exactly how I'm going to ask it.

McCARTHY: All right.

STERN: The oral history collection at the library is enormous; we've got over a thousand interviews, so far. Some are with people who knew the President, personally, and others who were members of the administration and, in some cases, never even met him, but, as we're reviewing these things and trying to improve the collection, we find there really is quite an extraordinary difficulty in getting insight into what kind of a person he was, because there tended to be bickering in the last few years. We got, essentially, the new muckrakers, the new negative dimension which tends to happen with all major historical figures; it's inevitable.

KERRY: I think most people expect after eight or nine years go by.

STERN: It happens; it always does; you have to expect it.

[-35-]

Then, on the other side, even people who knew him very well and who have served with the government, who can, I think, because of the nature of his death--I think that's a major factor--tend to over sentimentalize and over romanticize. They become--it's very difficult for them to talk objectively about him.

McCARTHY: Yes.

STERN: And one of the things that we're trying to get is people who can tell us exactly what kind of a person he was. What was he like when you were with him alone, in a family situation or--any insights that you have along those lines would be tremendously valuable.

McCARTHY: Well, there's one and I have a little booklet that I wrote it up in and it was my last personal experience with him before the presidency. It was, let's see, the summer of '50 because we had just attended Bobby and Ethel's [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] wedding--a lovely wedding in Connecticut...

STERN: That was when he was in Congress.

McCARTHY: ...when he was in Congress and Aunt Rose

[-36-]

had wanted mother and I--daddy had to get back to Florida, he was in the real estate business and he had to go back on business--but we had some free time and Aunt Rose wanted us to come down to Hyannisport for a week or so before we returned to Florida, so we did and... My bedroom is no longer in existence but it used to be in existence in the house. There used to be two bedrooms downstairs, now there's only one and they've turned the other into an office for Aunt Rose's secretary, but at the time, it was a bedroom. And the farthest one was Jack's bedroom because he didn't sleep well, of course, because of the back pain. He was up a great deal and it led out to the porch so he could go out and kind of roam around, stretch his legs and not wake up the whole family. So I was in the little one beside his and mother was upstairs near somewhere around Aunt Rose's and that night I got awfully feverish--I don't know what had happened--but I started running a heck of a fever and I had the most awful stomach cramps and so had proceeded about eight times into the bathroom, trying to be quiet and not

[-37-]

disturb him because he slept so poorly anyhow. I finally had gotten back into the bed and had put on every spare blanket I could find in drawers or in the closet over me and was kind of shaking and I could hear the door opening on Jack's side and I kept thinking--oh God, being tired--and I thought, did I leave it locked. Because so often you automatically lock a door and then you can't remember if you unlocked the thing or not. So I hadn't, and he came through and he called and he said, "Are you awake?" and I said, "I'm so sorry I disturbed you but I just feel so awful," and then he just went back in and I thought, Oh well, he just doesn't want to chat anymore, so that was the end of that. About ten minutes later, he came in and he had a hot water bottle, he had aspirin, he had cold ice water, a glass of cold ice water, I don't know what all else--all the home remedy cure-alls that you could possibly think of--and he switched on a small reading light and he said, "Now, I don't know what you've got, but some of these helped me, so why don't you try any or all of them. They can't kill you." So, bless his heart, I took the aspirin, and I drank the ice

[-38-]

water, I snuggled up to the hot water bottle, and he found another blanket from his closet and he added to the pile I had on, and he sat on a chair and just talked quietly for about an hour until I fell asleep. It was the kindest, sweetest, most cousinly thing that I think I had ever had done for me and, I have a lot of cousins and I love them all but that was just the most gentle and understanding thing. Then when I saw him in the morning, later on, just--we were having breakfast on.... A buffet. Frequently Aunt Rose just had the breakfast things to the side and you helped yourself when you got up. And he said, "Well you look much better; your color is much better now. Do you think you're going to be alright?" And I said, "Yes, I think I am. Thank you for last night." And he said, "I was happy to." You know, and it just shows that he had a sympathetic kindness that a lot of men don't have--ought to, but don't. And that was my kind of last experience. I was just going into my senior year in college and he was a young congressman so I don't think it was too much later that he finally married Jackie. I don't know, I think it was--I don't know how many

[-39-]

years later, but it wasn't too much later that he was seriously thinking of marriage and went into it. I remember when I heard of the engagement, I thought, "He'll make a lovely husband; he'll be very kind and sympathetic."

STERN: Did you go to the wedding?

McCARTHY: No we didn't. I was a young school teacher at the time and the finances just didn't warrant a trip to Hammersmith Farm [Newport, Rhode Island], but we were very envious of the cousins that were getting there and Aunt Rose had called many times and said, "Do come; it's going to be lovely," but we just couldn't go. Mother and daddy, that particular year, weren't feeling strong enough and they couldn't go either. [Interruption] So that was my little story about that.

STERN: Oh that's excellent; that's a marvelous story. [Inaudible] Mr. Ronsheim [Robert Ronsheim] apparently had some problems with the tape, he may have turned it off by accident. You told him a marvelous story about P.J. being fortified with soup...

McCARTHY: Oh yes!

STERN: ...and the recollection of that....

[-40-]

McCARTHY: The soup story. Oh, and the tape went off on his soup story?

STERN: Apparently; so I'm going to try and get it.

McCARTHY: Okay, we'll try for the soup story again.

STERN: Relating that to the inauguration.

McCARTHY: Yes. Well, grandmother, very early, realized that political meetings were so windy, especially--oh I think, probably, they still are. Kerry's

a

little bit in politics now and she finds, already, that somebody gets up and has an awful lot to say about nothing. And, I'm sure that at the time of smoke-filled rooms, when grandpa was running for things, it even more so, and grandma found that he always would miss supper, or not get enough to eat and would come home rather grouchy. So she decided that the best thing to do when P.J., or Pat as she called him at the time, had to go to a political affair, she would fix a large bowl of chowder, or chicken soup or beef soup, and have him have that and some saltine crackers before he left--you know, just a huge, big container full of it. Then she would lay out his clothes and have him go and then, when there was a great delay with dinner and the other men, who didn't realize it but were just

[-41-]

getting fussy, would be irritable, grandpa was able to soothe the frayed nerves and the tempers that were flaring because he was happily fortified by grandmother's soup. And so, later on, when during the inaugural parade, when we watched Jack in the little glassed-in enclosure that they had the family in, he would send, about every half hour or about every twenty minutes, for hot clam chowder and would fortify himself with the clam chowder all during that icy, cold day seeing the parade and we chuckled because everybody said, well, shades of the past, the grandson is enjoying his hot soup during a political affair and so he will be charming afterwards because he's all full of delicious, warm soup. So that was kind of a soup story. [Laughter]

STERN: Do you have any other recollections of his relationship, during the thirties--during those years you were going to the house during the summers--with any of his other brothers and sisters, particularly, for example, Kathleen, not Kathleen, Rosemary?

McCARTHY: Well, they were all awfully sweet to Rosemary. Aunt Rose usually included something, you know, be sure you take Rosemary here or there, wherever

[-42-]

they--the older ones--were going, and they were very thoughtful and kind to her and, in fact, I really, as a youngster, I didn't realize there was the slightest anything wrong with her except that she was not as fast moving as the others. For instance, Eunice was so competitive too, like her brothers, and she, Eunice, was always dashing and going and everything else and she was always so terribly thin and the family were divided down the middle; some couldn't seem to lose weight and some couldn't seem to gain weight, so Aunt Rose was always trying to fix the menu so that there would be something in it that would fatten up the thin ones and would "skinny" down the chubby ones. So Eunice and Jack were always the excruciatingly thin ones, so she was always trying to get something extra into the second serving of dessert or, I think I mentioned the last time that he loved a thing called Floating Island which I have never been able to find since, which was absolutely heavenly. It had lots of lemon and lots of meringue and was served on an enormous silver platter, and you had to sort of chase it around because it was sort of flying in the air with the meringue going up and everything and it just melted in

[-43-]

your mouth, you couldn't even chew it. Jack loved that so that Aunt Rose was always thrilled when he always having three servings of floating island so he would gain something.

STERN: He did have a sweet tooth?

McCARTHY: Yes. But he didn't gain and neither did Eunice, but all of them were very kind to her and she particularly loved my mother and she did come home frequently with us, in the summer vacation and, although I was years and years younger, because of her problem, we got along beautifully because she didn't demand as much as a normal older child would have demanded. The visits were very pleasant and very happy. Mother had been a school teacher for years and, I think, had a certain affinity for the child, which just worked out well. Our visits were good.

STERN: You mentioned that you had spent a month, I think, at Palm Beach in '38 and he was there at the time.

McCARTHY: Yes. We had.... Well, I named all the people before: let's see, my Aunt Margaret and Uncle Charlie Burke and mommy and daddy [George and Loretta Connelly] and Marnie Burke,

[-44-]

who was their only daughter, and me, and Pappy and Jack Fitzgerald and Mrs. Fitzgerald and Jack Kennedy. Then we had.... The housekeepers were Neil and Margaret Swan and their little girl, Sally. And it was just a heavenly time, just absolutely heavenly. We left in a god-awful snowstorm--I remember going up to the South Station and Uncle Joe had arranged a whole car for us, just for the family--you know, a Pullman car--and it was simply delightful. It was on the Orange Blossom Special, which I thought sounded terribly romantic. Anyhow, we met and John F.... I had never really known him before and he became my companion during that time and he was so good to me and so sweet and the next morning we went to sleep watching the snow still come down in New York State or something, as we were going through, and in Pennsylvania, and the next morning when we woke up and the porters had opened windows and the balmiest, loveliest air was coming through the

[-45-]

train and we couldn't believe it. When we got to the station in West Palm Beach, John F. had me get off the train with him and we ran into the station and they had big displays of perfume that was Orange Blossom perfume--and they had little wax orange blossom flowers on the outside--and he bought some for each of the ladies in the car--you know, for Mrs. Fitzgerald and for mommy and everybody else--and then gave me my first grownup bottle of perfume that I had. I kept it for years, I just loved the idea that at ten I was being given my own special bottle of perfume. That was just precious of him and he was the first gentleman I ever danced with--that was when I danced the waltz in the Breakers Hotel during that time with him and he was just lovely. As I mentioned before, Jack's relationship with his granddaddy was absolutely delightful. Of course, he was his namesake, but, at that point, Jack towered over grandpa Fitzgerald--he was such a little man, you know, just a little tiny fellow and I guess that's why I felt so at ease with him as a child--and Jack was so tall. He already was six feet two at that point, and he was excruciatingly thin, he

[-46-]

looked like pictures of people from Dachau [Nazi Concentration Camp in Germany], you know, the ribs all showed; you could count the ribs. He had a wonderfully handsome face but his little body was just so slim and grandpa Fitzgerald was always teasing about if he was going to bring back the Port of Boston, he would have to have some steaks or some haddock or some something so he would be strong enough to bring back the Port of Boston. We had lovely times; we had a costume party the last night we were there and everybody wore whatever we could find around the house and we put it on. Mother and daddy had been brought some Japanese kimonos by a foreign correspondent that they had known, and they

dressed in Japanese attire and they had no idea that. . . . Well, was it before the war wasn't it? Yes, it was way before the war, wasn't it? Yes, '38, so we had no idea we were going into a war with Japan or I guess they wouldn't have worn it, but anyhow, mother looked beautiful. I can't remember. I think Jack wore a sailor suit with a funny hat that was too small for him. I don't know where he found it

[-47-]

but somewhere in some one of the closets around the place--and I wore a kilt that belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Swan's son who was going to the University of Edinburgh. It was a lovely; we had dinner on the patio. There was a pretty. . . . It was a long walk, perhaps you know the Palm Beach house--it was a long walk from the street into the house and then there's a lovely, terraced patio out there so we had had the dinner out there. We sang songs all night and it was just delightful. We just had a marvelous time.

STERN: How did he relate to his grandfather?

McCARTHY: Beautifully.

STERN: Was there a great deal of affection between them?

McCARTHY: Oh enormous affection; they were always hugging. You know, they'd give one. . . . It was funny because grandpa Fitzgerald would just about reach his lower rib cage, you know when he'd be giving him a big hug. Not to be disrespectful, but grandpa Fitzgerald had a lisp, a little speech impediment, that was very appealing and he would say, "What are we going to do with this boy, he's just the most

[-48-]

delightful young man on earth but he doesn't have a girl yet and he hasn't gotten a political position; he's practically useless," you know, and things like that. They teased all the time. It was just. . . . I can't remember anything but happiness during that entire month. Jack used to swim with us. Mommy and little Sally Swan and I would swim in the pool and he sort of was the lifeguard. He'd always be there because we children had no sense at all about jumping off the diving board or falling in from the side or anything else and he always was available for lifesaving services. Thank god he wasn't needed but I think that the activity of the children would have drowned him but he was always there in case he was needed. And then I mentioned, on the other tape, I know, about the sauna and, you know, about the little sunburn where he and grandpa Fitz used to sunbathe *au naturel* and that there was a great deal of laughing and teasing about the various and sundry physiques because little grandpa Fitzgerald had gotten quite round and pudgy at that time and Jack was so thin. So they teased one another unmercifully and, of course, since there was no top on the thing, all of us lying

[-49-]

around the pool could hear the nonsense going in there and it was--you know, it caused a lot of laughter. Everybody got along so well. And the men would golf during the day; we'd swim in the morning and then we'd golf in the day and then at night they'd go to dinner at the Breakers or something and then the Swans would take Marnie and I to the movies. It was heaven; I just loved it. I wasn't in school, everybody else was in school. I got a whole month away from school. It probably ruined my marks, but I never cared.

STERN: Did you seem him at all during the period of--when he came back after the war, at any time--during the mid-forties?

McCARTHY: No, I don't think so.

KERRY: [Inaudible]

STERN: Oh yes, that.

McCARTHY: That and then other than the one I just told you...

KERRY: [Inaudible]

McCARTHY: Well I don't remember whether that was a war injury. And then at the inauguration and then the time in '50 when he was so sweet to me, after Bobby's wedding. Those were the only times I'd seen him since. As I mentioned to Mr. Ronsheim, I think, just as you say, there

[-50-]

are the muckrakers and there are the deifiers and I don't think he deserves either one. He was a most delightful and intelligent and fine looking human being and he wanted wonderful things for the country. But he wasn't a saint and certainly he wasn't that kind of a sinner and I think it's cruel. At the time... I have friends--I have nuns--when he first died that tried to sanctify and deify him and I said, "Don't do that, he was wonderful, wonderful, but he wasn't a saint." They'd use the term, "He died, he was a saint," and I would say, "No, he wasn't." He was a normal, human male, but a wonderful one, a good man, and one that loved his wife, was respectful and loved his dad and his mamma and was good to his sisters and was fun for his brothers and was somebody to admire. But, he was not a saint, but these recent things that are coming up--I hope I'm never in the same room with any of these women, I don't think they'll ever leave the room alive. [Laughter] I'll just put it that bluntly.

STERN: On a more somber note, do you have any special recollections of, for example, when Joe Jr. died, when Kick as killed, that

[-51-]

sort of thing, the impact of those events on the family?

McCARTHY: Oh yes. It was terrible when Joe Jr. died. I remember momma answering the phone and then just kind of going down--not quite in a faint--but Uncle Joe was on the phone telling her that it had been....

STERN: He called her....

McCARTHY: Yes, he phoned her to tell her and he said, "Loretta, we've lost young Joe," and she said, "No, no, it couldn't be," and then she started to cry. I can't remember much more of the conversation. She simply could not speak enough to comfort Uncle Joe in any way, and she just said, "I'll call," and she just hung up and sobbed. There was a little phone table that she was leaning on and crying and I said, "Mommy, did Joe Jr. get killed?" and she said, "Yes, his plane crashed over the English Channel or over Germany," or something. She just couldn't.... Then she said, "Maybe he isn't dead," and was hoping for a while. Then she called my Aunt Margaret and Uncle Joe had just called her and the two of them wept together, and it was just terrible. For weeks, that's all we thought of

[-52-]

was that he had gone. Momma wrote a beautiful poem and I have a copy somewhere; and I don't know where. It's called "The Moat, the Call and the Gold," and it was.... One night, shortly after his death, she had gone out and looked over the.... Well, our home in Winthrop overlooked Logan Airport and you could just--well, it overlooked Boston as a whole--you could see the planes that would come up and go over the tops of the buildings and go out to sea. So one of them took off and I don't know whether it was a naval plane or not, perhaps so, but, anyhow, it reminded momma of young Joe and she wrote this poem in honor of him, the gist of it being that, like Joe's life, it was so quick and it was so beautiful and like a flash of silver in the wings of the plane disappearing into the distance and she was sure that something beautiful waited for him beyond--in our particular faith we do feel there is an after-life and God was simply taking him sooner than some of the rest of us. But mother, like Aunt Rose, was extremely religious and her whole feeling was that we can't understand why, but it happened and we simply accept it, but it

[-53-]

was very hard. It was awful for everybody; everybody mourned him. I had been particularly mad for him. The last time I had seen him he had come to our house on a Christmas afternoon, unexpectedly. He couldn't get enough time to get off. I was about, I guess, fifteen at the time. I opened the front door and he was in his naval lieutenant's outfit and he just looked super--he was just gorgeous. That marvelous smile that he had that later on, you know, that is referred to as the Kennedy smile--most of us have quite a nice one, I think, and he just radiated warmth. Joe was such an outgoing young man, and everybody just loved him right away. And he said, "Oh my god, you've grown up and you're gorgeous," and, of

course, I was without sense enough to hardly speak except to open the door and I said, "Oh Joe, is it you?" And he said, "I can't get home, I can't find grandma and Grandpa Fitzgerald and I'm starving to death, and I thought Aunt Loretta and Uncle George will feed a starving nephew," and so I said, "Oh, come in." So he stayed the whole afternoon and we had a wonderful visit and daddy made one of his enormous club sandwiches that practically went half-way up the wall, it was so big and Joe

[-54-]

said that if he realized that Uncle George cooked like that, he would have been coming Christmas after Christmas, but usually they spent Christmas in Palm Beach but this particular year he couldn't go home. He had a convertible--it wasn't his, he had borrowed somebody's from the base--and had come. And then he asked if I wanted a ride around town and, of course, here it was, December twenty-fifth, in the East, freezing cold, and we had the top of the convertible down while he drives me around so I could show-off to all my little girlfriends in Winthrop, and they were so envious, it was just wonderful, I had just had them all absolutely wild with curiosity. Later on--it was months before I told them it was my cousin. I just told them it was a young man that was calling on me and they thought, at fifteen, that was quite a coup--a naval lieutenant. Then he had to go and that was the last time I saw Joe Jr., but he was such a marvelous and delightful young man. It was fantastic.

STERN: Apparently, at that point, Jack was a much more retiring, less public person....

McCARTHY: Oh, very much more. They were really different personalities, completely. As the

[-55-]

years went on, Jack learned to come forward and to speak up and to make himself heard by others, but it took a lot of self-discipline. Joe just had it, he was just born with it, he was so wonderfully gregarious. He had charisma before they started using the word charisma about the Kennedy men. It was just a natural thing, he did it from the time he was twelve. He'd walk in a room, "How's everybody!" He just knew and liked everybody, and he was curious and interested and he felt very special. He had that right along, until he died. He went so young, but I think he could have had a magnificent career. There's no doubt that he could have achieved the presidency, perhaps even faster than his brother had. But Jack was to be the literary member of the family; he was going to be the historian, the one that would write everything down, keep tabs on it and Joe was to be the politician, and was just made for it. He was....

STERN: Excuse me. You think then that Jack was much more of a learning experience to become a public figure, than it would have been for Joe?

[-56-]

McCARTHY: Oh, I think it was terribly hard. That first experience where Uncle Joe took him in the limousine and dropped him off at Scollay Square and just said, "Go shake hands." I mean that must have been horrifying for a basically shy boy, you know, to march up to the toughs that you would find there and say, "Hi. I'm Jack Kennedy and I'm running for Congress." That's awfully tough, you know, where Joe would have gotten a kick out of it, young Joe.

STERN: Yes. He learned though. He actually created a style of his own.

McCARTHY: Yes, he did, but I think it was very, very difficult for him in the beginning. I'm sure it was. Bobby, later on--he wasn't like either one of them, really. Actually, all four boys were so completely different. Everybody thinks.... I mean, I think people that don't know the family, they just think they're all, well, kind of alike. They see curly hair, or a lovely smile or a nice physique and they'll say, "See, there's another...." They weren't though, they all had different personalities, completely different. Bobby was so feisty. He had a great kindness, but he was also such a

[-57-]

little, I don't know, bantam rooster. Sometimes I think of people as animals and I think that Bobby, you would have to put that he was a little rooster. He was always.... Maybe because he wasn't as big, physically, as all of his brothers. And then, Aunt Rose used to say that she was concerned because he came between a whole flock of girls. He had Rosemary, Kick, Eunice, and Pat ahead of him and Jean after him, so he was in the midst of all the girls and maybe that's why he was.... He had to prove his masculinity more than the others felt they had to. They didn't have to, they were just themselves, but Bobby always had to prove something. Teddy, he was a completely different one. He came so much later than everybody and I think he felt he was being bossed around by everybody--he was. He was kind of a pesty little kid, really. [Laughter] Oh, this will be wonderful on tape. He really was, he whined a lot, fussed a lot, he didn't get taken sailing. He wasn't a very well-coordinated child, Teddy wasn't, as a very little boy and he was always unbalancing us on the boat. We were always sure to practically tip over or to lose a life preserver or something else if Teddy was with us and Jean

[-58-]

and I were the closest in age, so he was always saying, "Take me," or "Can I come?" Frequently if he was irritable or fussy we told him, "No!" And he always reported to the general staff and we usually got it later on, when he didn't come along, but, he's grown up a lot since then. But it is funny, I know one time when we were visiting Hyannisport--we were going up to Salem to see these friends I spoke of before--and she said, "Well, you must stay and meet Teddy," and I started to laugh and I said, "Aunt Rose, I met Taddy years ago," and she quipped, "Well, he wasn't State Senator then." And I said, "Well, I'm terribly impressed,

but I'd really rather go to Salem," so we went to Salem. I don't think Teddy's heart was broken because we didn't stay to see him again but, of course, we've seen him quite a little bit since then, but it was kind of funny. I still think of him as little Teddy. He towers over me--when I saw him last summer at Eunice's house--he's a great big man, but I still think of him as my baby cousin. I can't be awed by him.

STERN: I was interested by your remark about the fact that people tend to think of the brothers--the

[-59-]

Kennedy brothers--as being the same and that sort of thing. I think there are a lot of ways in which that kind of misunderstanding tends to blur, really, the accuracy of the historical record. People tend to stereotype...

McCARTHY: Yes, they do...

STERN: ...the family...

McCARTHY: I don't know how it can be counteracted unless you have a lot of cousins like myself that remember a thousand things that are different about the boys, but they're not all alike. I don't think children in any large family are all alike--they might have the same eyes or the same hair or the same physique, but they're not.... They all have different personalities, depending on what place in the family they're born. I think that influences them greatly and I think, too, that circumstances that come.... I think Teddy is, perhaps, a much stronger man now than, perhaps he would have been had he not lost his three older brothers. It's a horrifying thing to have the responsibility of all the children of all those brothers, plus his own, plus keeping, being a male source from that one family. Of course, Sarge [Robert Sargent Shriver] is a marvelous man and Stephen Smith [Stephen E. Smith] and.... Is there

[-60-]

another one? No, there are just Sarge and Stephen, but he is the only Kennedy man left, so all that falls to him. That's very hard; it's an awful lot of responsibility and I don't know if any one man can carry that on. You know, it's a small empire and it's a very tough job for anybody to have on their shoulders, but I think he's doing awfully well with a majority of the youngsters. It's very hard and I do think that having Stephen and Sargent is a lovely, is great because they all get along, which makes it awfully nice.

STERN: The people who are trying to put together a film for the, when the new building is completed--the first things that people will do as they come in will be to see a film on JFK, an attempt to explain why he had the kind of political feel he had, and it's a very difficult thing for them to do because they don't

want to deify him and yet, on the other hand, the stereotypes are so difficult to get around and they have really caught on.

McCARTHY: Well, I think one of the things that so interesting about him is, he was completely different from most politicians at that point. He was so well educated, he

[-61-]

was the son of a very wealthy man, he had political position--I mean he had position as far as wealth was concerned--and he wasn't liked by the ordinary, say, for instance, dock worker or streetcar conductor, or people like that, they said, "How can you know our problems, you haven't had any. You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth and you have no understanding of us at all. You might be a nice looking, personable young man, but you're not going to represent me." He had to overcome all of that and I think that that was probably pretty rugged. The thing that they brought out not too long ago was when some of the dock workers were shaking with him--what did they have in their hands, Kerry?

KERRY: Nothing really, they just held their hands like that.

McCARTHY: They held the nails up.

KERRY: To cut into the palm of the hand.

McCARTHY: In other words, to see if he could take it. Well, in his own way, he had learned to take it many ways, but all they saw were the very smoothly polished young man who couldn't possibly know their trials

[-62-]

and tribulations, but although he perhaps didn't know all of them then, he wanted to and he was a very quick study. And with a man like David Powers' [David F. Powers] help, he wanted to learn "What is necessary; what should I do to learn more about these men. How do they feel, what do they need? Tell me and I'll try and do it." And since he had already then, through Uncle Joe, set his goal on politics, then, like anything else, he wanted to do a good job of it. That's the important thing, I think, if you want to do a good job then, and you get the chance to do it, then you delve and I think he was that type of a student, he delved into, you know, "What must I do to be a good congressman and a good senator and then a good President." And I think West Virginia really showed that. In such a short time, that the miners, the coal miners of West Virginia could say, "This man knows and understands us." And, you know, fifteen years before, he probably would never have known about how West Virginia people feel when they're starving to death, when their children lose their teeth at fourteen because they've never seen a dentist, you know, and things like that.

[-63-]

But this man wanted to know. He said, "All right, I didn't suffer like this, but maybe I can help." That's the remarkable thing about Jack Kennedy, I think, is that--and Bobby following--is that they... Bobby didn't grow up in Watts, but his whole thought was, "How can I make things better for these black people? Jack tried to make things better for white people and then the blacks, now how can I go a step farther? How can I do something better?" And that's wonderful and that, of course, comes from their parents and from both sets of grandparents--this urge to better the lot of those that are responsible for putting you in this position. You don't get in this position and then just have a field day; you get in there and then do something good. And that was their thing.

STERN: Do you object to some of the common stereotypes who--the kind of thing that the Kennedys don't cry, that kind of thing?

McCARTHY: Oh, I hate it! I think it's idiotic, to tell you the truth. Kerry and I came up for Uncle Joe's funeral, and honestly, I

[-64-]

admired my Uncle Joe more than anybody that I have ever known of, heard of, read of, anything in my life. One of the, you know, proudest titles I have is Joe Kennedy's niece. I adored the man, and, I think, most of the nieces and nephews--I don't know how many you've interviewed--but I think if you talk to many of them, three-fourths of them will say the same thing, that we admired him beyond bounds. And, then what he went through after the stroke. My dad got cancer that year, Uncle Joe had the stroke, and my uncle Frank, daddy's brother, had a heart attack. The Irish say things come in threes, I don't know whether they really do, but they did with me that year. I watched my father go downhill, I watched my Uncle Frank die, and I watched, from a distance, but then with intermittent visits, watched Uncle Joe deteriorate from a strong, vital man to going through what he was going through. But I remember talking to a

[-65-]

therapist and the therapist said, "I came on for only a few weeks. I was supposed to just do my thing with Ambassador Kennedy and then go on my way." And he said, "I stayed." (I guess at that point he had stayed two years). And I said, I kind of teased him and I said, "Yes, I suppose the pay was good." "Oh, the pay was fine, but," he said, "that had nothing to do with it." He said, "This man has such guts and such courage, raw courage. To get up and walk fifteen steps around that pool takes such courage and causes such pain, that any man who... I would tell him to take ten, he would take twelve. If I told him to take twelve, he would take fifteen." He said, "Anybody with that kind of courage wants to come back so badly," he said, "I'll work."

[END TAPE 2]

[BEGIN TAPE 3]

McCARTHY: That was one of the main things that I wanted to bring out. At the church there wasn't a bench without somebody sobbing and many of us were, you know, the family. In fact, had Aunt Rose said that she wanted the funeral to be quite small and that people from the family--just family members--were the only ones that she'd wanted to have and then

[-66-]

some people that had been very, very close to uncle Joe through all his life--and he had such loyal friends. Actually, you could have filled a cathedral with people that wanted to come but, to go along with Aunt Rose's wishes, only a smaller group of us came. But I saw my cousins, Pat and Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith], faces before the funeral and they were devastated with long lines--deep furrows and lines where those poor girls had been sobbing since the death of their father. Uncle Joe represented far more than just a father figure, I think, to his own children and to those of us that were nieces and nephews. He was such strength--I don't know, moral strength and physical strength--he just always represented them. I don't want to be ridiculous about it, but, really, except for God, I can't think of anybody that impresses me more. [Laughter] He just was a remarkable man and he pulled forth such loyalty and yes, I cried, I cried buckets when he went. It just seemed that the world was sort of turning over, even though I knew

[-67-]

that he had a stroke and he couldn't speak anymore and he didn't have his strength anymore, just the fact that he existed on the earth gave me a feeling of safety. And most of us, and my poor little mother, she was devastated and in poor health and could not come and, you know, our conversation when I got back to Illinois, trying to tell mother about what it was like, you know, it was.... I don't know.... Twenty-five dollars of crying, coast to coast, was the best I could say in trying to explain to mother how things were.

[-68-]

I think the main thing when that came up years ago is probably that we don't make scenes in public, is what it came from. I mean, it's just a.... If you lose the race, don't put on quite a hysterical scene and embarrass other members of the family; please keep it to yourself until you're at home, and that's always very good advice. My mother was a, was death on, if we were at a restaurant, please, no scenes. Sometimes I would bring two or three little friends with where I was an only child and, perhaps there'd be a little nonsense or somebody would get a larger there serving of ice cream and there would be, "That's not fair, Lonnie got a bigger thing than I did," and mother would say, "Not here," and that meant we are in public, behave yourself, be a lady, stop it, and I think that's where "The Kennedys don't cry" comes

from. In other words, let's not just carry on for everybody to see our misery, and our unhappiness when something devastating has happened to us;

[-69-]

could we not just please wait until we're among ourselves and then we could give vent to our grief, but don't let's put on quite a song-and-dance routine for the whole world. It's sensible advice for any family but it's made them sound like they're very hard, impersonal people and I think that's unfair.

STERN: Did you ever discuss, for example, with your Aunt Rose, the deaths of either Jack or Bobby?

McCARTHY: Never. No. I remember with Uncle Joe, mamma had a beautiful painting done of Joe Jr. after he died. There was a picture in a plane--him in the doorway of a plane--and it was Uncle Joe and mamma and Joe Jr. with their arms through mom's and she had the photographer take her out of the picture and put Joe Jr. beside his daddy. And they both had on lovely, like almost velvet top coats and homburg hats, and it was a wonderful picture, you know. Uncle Joe had that wonderful smile and Joe Jr. was waving goodbye. It was a very vital, alive type of picture. And she had it, had the photographer enlarge it and color it and sent

[-70-]

it to Uncle Joe, and he was kind of devastated by it. And Aunt Rose had put it up for a while and then every time he saw it in the room he would turn and go to another room, finally, she phoned mamma and said, "Loretta, Joe just cannot look at the pictures of Joe Jr. right now, it's just too soon. It hurts too much, he can't bear it." So all the pictures, for a while, of Joe Jr. were taken down and taken out of the house. I don't know how much time it was, but it would have to be a certain amount of time until he could bear the grief again. And then, after a while, it got so horrifying because then Billy [William Cavendish Marquis of Hartington] went, Kathleen's lovely young husband and then Kick died and then Jack was reported missing in action and it just seemed like the family--from nine gorgeous, strong children--were going to be cut down to nothing before the war ended. Thank God it ended and it stopped killing off the children and then, of course, Jack survived and came back and then almost died with the back operation again. And then, of course, just when everything

[-71-]

looked wonderful, then the maniac shot him. So it was very hard for Uncle Joe to bear all of this and he... You know, we are of Irish ancestry and there are different kinds of Irish people like there are different kinds of English or Jewish people or Israeli. You know, there are all kinds of personalities but there are the sort of emotional Irish, and then there are sort of the ones that can have a stiff upper lip and all that kind of thing, too. And I think it's kind of funny because I--in doing background studies--I found, with both the Kennedys and the

Fitzgeralds, the mothers are from the stronger, the harder types. The Hannons--Aunt Rose's--the Hannons, Mrs. Fitzgerald was a much less demonstrative person than Mr. Fitzgerald, who was very outgoing, very loving. She was a wonderful woman, but she didn't show very much. On the Kennedy side, Mary Hickey was a very severe woman and the Hickey women, going back, were very, very firm and very severe and the men, the Kennedy men, were very loving and open and....

[-72-]

So, from the male side, on both sides, you find great emotion and from the women's side, you find the holding back, which is kind of a reverse thing than you expect.

STERN: Is that how it was with the President's parents?

McCARTHY: I think that. . . . Well, of course, sometimes Uncle Joe looked awfully severe, but I always found him awfully loving. I mean he always was a great one for hugging me. I got lots of hugs and I loved it, and mostly approval, which was kind of a joy because not everybody did. But I seemed to please him. I have a pretty singing voice and I had a nice little singing voice as a child and his children can't hold a note. None of his children sing well; they're awful singers, just god-awful, and they all love music, but they can't sing anything. And my grandmother and my great-aunt were soloists in church and mother had a lovely voice and thank god, I've got it. So when we'd have things in the evening, Uncle Joe would always say after we had group singing that his ears had suffered enough, he would say, "Let's have Mary sing, please; let's

[-73-]

have her do a little something." And mother would always have pre-prepared me with the entire rundown of the newest show or whatever Cole Porter had just written or anything else, and so then I would come out and do "Anything Goes" or whatever was the "in" thing then and that seemed to please Uncle Joe tremendously. So I think, maybe I was kind of a little favorite among the nieces--maybe that's just patting myself on the back, but I always got that feeling.

STERN: And your. . . . Perhaps this is a sort of personal question, you don't have to answer it, of course, if you don't want to, but have you ever regretted being a Kennedy?

McCARTHY: Only when we've been threatened and yes, and yes, and that's been frightening.

STERN: Your own family has been threatened?

McCARTHY: Yes, our own little branch of the family. My children's school was bomb threatened so many times during the time of the presidency, that

the children and the nuns got so philosophical about it that the children just decided that it was time out from school and it was really kind of nice.

STERN: You mean people discovered that you were

[-74-]

relatives of the President and thus threatened your family?

McCARTHY: Oh yes. Well, you see, they had known it for years. They had known that mother was the ambassador's sister for years and years and years and mostly it had no adverse effect at all.

STERN: Was this in Florida?

McCARTHY: This was in Florida. Don't forget, now this is at the time when Jack is backing Martin Luther King. Florida is heavily bi-racial. There are black schools and there are white schools, there are black parts of town, there are white parts of town. The Klan [Ku Klux Klan] is strong; there were cross burnings on the outskirts of all the southern towns. You say, okay, this is 1977, that's a pipe dream, uh, uh. That was 1961 and that existed and so after he got in power--some didn't want him in anyhow--but even the ones that voted for him, when they found that he was going to give the blacks all these rights, I mean, there were separate washrooms in railroad stations. You know, there was "black" on one of them

[-75-]

and white on the other and, you know, you dare not go into one or the other unless you were the right color. This, this hate against a man that was going to change their way of life came at us because we were the relatives--and close relatives--after a lot of people began to realize, my God, there's a close blood relationship! The girl is first cousin to the President, the woman is aunt and godmother, there is a very close relationship here. The children are first cousins once removed, so, yes, we had death threats and bomb threats and were roughed up and those times I wasn't too thrilled about being a... I've always been proud of the family but it's very frightening because, unlike the family, we didn't have enormous wealth to protect ourselves, but the authorities in the town were very good to us and we, and momma sent all the letters and everything off to

[-76-]

Bobby because, of course, he was attorney general then and he had such power there, she didn't want to bother Jack with it and she didn't want to upset Aunt Rose with it and, of course, Uncle Joe had had the stroke so she couldn't talk to him about it, so she just sent everything to Bobby. It eased eventually, but it was a very frightening....

STERN: I wonder if those letters have ended up in his papers--they might even be in the library?

McCARTHY: Take a peek.

KERRY: We would go to church when the bomb threats would come through and it was about a two block walk up to the cathedral and it got so that after a while classmates would say, "Oh, somebody's trying to bomb you today?"

[-77-]

and I would say, "I guess so." I mean, you know, we were only in third or fourth grade and the nuns would hover, you know, around you walking down the street so, obviously, you were aware of it but it became kind of a relaxed atmosphere--well, not for mom and dad, I'm sure--but, being little, I didn't understand the importance of it.

McCARTHY: No. It was very scary and we had had a death threat on Christmas Eve--that they were going to destroy the children and us--you know, that type of thing. You wonder what kind of mind does it and yet, as these years have gone on and we see the crime increasing and everything else you realize, that was just the beginning of what has come over these last twenty some years.

STERN: This has been an interview with Mary L. McCarthy, first cousin of President Kennedy,

[-78-]

daughter of Loretta Kennedy, Joseph P. Kennedy's sister, at Hyannis, Massachusetts, July 13, 1977.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-79-]