

Barbara Gamarekian Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 6/10/1964
Administrative Information

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(1925-2004) Staff assistant, John F. Kennedy's Presidential campaign (1960); staff assistant, transition talent recruitment staff (1960 - 1961); Secretary to the Assistant Press Secretary, White House Press Office (1961 - 1963), discusses the operation of the Press Office, among other issues.

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Barbara Gamarekian
Barbara Gamarekian

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Archivist of the United States

April 12, 1976
Month Day Year

May 6, 1976
Month Day Year

Barbara Gamarekian – JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

With

Barbara Gamarekian

June 10, 1964

Newark Street, Washington D.C.

By Diane T. Michaelis

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MICHAELIS: Barbara, why don't we start off by finding out exactly how you did come to the job with President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy], in the early stages.

GAMAREKIAN: Well, I'd worked in Washington for Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] and then I was up in New York for a while and came back to Washington at the time of the campaign. I'd never worked on a campaign and thought that it would be a marvelous experience to see a campaign from the inside out. At that time the nominee had not been chosen, so Senator Humphrey took me out to the Convention with him.

I worked as a volunteer with the Minnesota delegation and then came back to Washington and pounded on the door at the

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Kennedy Headquarters and eventually got a very interesting job working at the administrative end of the campaign.

I didn't have, I think, strong feelings about President Kennedy at that point as a candidate. I had seen him on the Hill and had known about him, of course, for years. I didn't have any great sense of personal loyalty to him. There would have been, perhaps, several

candidates I could have worked for as easily as for President Kennedy, although I was a very staunch Democrat and wanted any Democrat to win over Nixon [Richard M. Nixon].

MICHAELIS: What kinds of things were you doing when you said administrative end of the campaign?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, all the campaign coordinators reported to us. We had campaign coordinators in each of the states who were Kennedy men. They went in and tried to discover the progress of the campaign on the state level and reported back to us.

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Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] headed up this organization. I worked with Dick Donahue [Richard K. Donahue] and Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan] and we supposedly were to have our finger on the pulse of the campaign at the grass roots level and supposedly knew how it was progressing across the country and where we needed to send shock troops and where we were in trouble. It was a fascinating place to work because you got an overall view of the campaign. And I think the one thing I discovered was that you never really do know exactly what's going on. We had as many surprises, I think, as other people. But even at this point I didn't see much of the President. He was always campaigning on the road and we were working back in Washington.

I think, like many Democrats, the TV debates were the first thing which began to make me identify somewhat with him and feel that I knew him a bit as a personality and a person rather than as the Democratic

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candidate. And it was great to begin to get terribly excited about your candidate and to begin to feel some feeling of personal loyalty and devotion to him. The last week of the campaign I joined the campaign train. They sent me up to New York and the last four or five days I travelled around with the President and the campaign group, the caravan.

This was my first experience campaigning on the road and also it was a revealing experience because I had never seen him stumping and speaking. I had never been terribly impressed with him as a speaker when I'd seen him on the floor of the Senate, but he was just marvelous out campaigning. It had been several years since I'd heard him speak. He had marvelous rapport with his audiences, and it was just great to be there and see it all happen. Each of the girls who had worked with him prior to the nomination were given an

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opportunity to spend a week or so on the campaign and they tried to rotate them so that we all had a chance to see a little bit of what a campaign was like in action.

MICHAELIS: Was that his policy particularly?

GAMAREKIAN: I'm sure it was. I never heard precisely that the President had asked that this be done but I assume that he was the one who thought it would be well for each of the people who had worked so hard for him before he was nominated to share in a bit of the excitement and glory of actually campaigning as a presidential candidate. I hadn't, of course, worked for him until after the nomination but I was just lucky, I guess, that they sent me up for a short time.

MICHAELIS: What did you do after the election? What did you do during the interim period?

GAMAREKIAN: I was asked to stay on. The same people who I had worked with during the campaign were those who were active in the talent hunt for finding people to staff the new

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administration. We were, in fact, almost busier at this point than we had been during the campaign. I've never seen such chaotic headquarters! Everyone just descended upon us in droves, but Ralph Dungan and Dick Donahue and Larry O'Brien and Adam Yarmolinsky and people of that nature worked on this, and I continued to work until a month or two before the inauguration when I was asked if I'd like to go on to the White House. And frankly, when I'd gone to work on the campaign I hadn't thought much beyond the campaign. I decided it would be interesting to end up in the White House and see what it would be like from that end of Pennsylvania Avenue since I'd worked up on the Hill previously.

I went to work in the Press Office at the White House. I hadn't worked with the press before. I hadn't worked with either Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger] or Andy [Andrew T. Hatcher].

MICHAELIS: What was that job called actually?

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GAMAREKIAN: Actually—

MICHAELIS: Press assistant or—

GAMAREKIAN: Well, I was hired primarily to work as a secretary to Andy Hatcher who was the Associate Press Secretary, but you weren't there long before you realized that it was a very flexible organization. Everyone hops in and does a little bit of everything. And I ended up taking dictation from Pierre occasionally or working for other people.

MICHAELIS: Everyone had some specific duties that—

GAMAREKIAN: At that point I handled guest lists for the President's press conferences and handled the accreditation. A year or so after I went to work there, I started working with photographers because the girl who had worked with them left and this is the area in which I saw a bit more of President Kennedy because I worked with photographers which meant taking them in for photo sessions into the President's

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office whenever he had an office visitor of whom they wanted a picture, or if it were some sort of ceremony or any kind of a public function in which he was playing a role and the photographers would be present. Sometimes it would mean going into the office for a minute or two. I would take them in and then call lights which would terminate the picture session. I would do picture captions for them, left to right. It was a fascinating job because I would meet everyone who would go in to see the President. I would have to go in and meet them first and get their visual identification so that when we went in for a picture later on, I'd know who the man with the bow tie was and who the man with the crew cut was so that I could do left to rights for picture captions for the photographers.

I also set up the physical arrangements for TV and other functions in the Rose Garden and anything which they had over at

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the House. I did see the President a number of times each day under pretty formal circumstances. Normally when I was there photographers were there and there would be some members of the press.

I saw him primarily at the time he was playing the "role of the President" and doing the things that presidents have to do, either acting as a host or speaking to a group of people, so that I don't feel that I have any great insights into the President as a man. I saw him in lots of different kinds of situations and amusing things happened at times and some sort of interesting little things to tell, but I don't feel that I had enough of a relationship with him as an individual that I have anything terribly exciting to tell about him as a person.

MICHAELIS: When was the first time that you realized that he knew your name?
You know, that you had established sort of—

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GAMAREKIAN: Oh, I'd been working in the White House for a year or a year and a half or so, and then for the last six months had been in and out of his office with photographers and had had conversations with him, things had come up, we'd talked business about things, but I never knew that he knew who I was or what my name was. I sometimes used to think that he probably thought that I came with the White House. I doubt very much that he even knew I worked on the campaign, although he may have. I think sometimes that he knew more about us than we realized he did.

But the first time I ever realized that he knew who I was I heard this voice calling “Barbara” as I walked by his office. It was a decided New England accent. There wasn’t much question about who it was and he was calling me into his office to scold me for something! There had been a misunderstanding about—

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MICHAELIS: What was he scolding about?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, actually we had had a request for a picture of the President with one of his luncheon guests. He was entertaining a group of labor leaders at luncheon, and we normally went in and got a picture of the entire group with the President at one point during the luncheon and—

MICHAELIS: That was with the official White House photographers?

GAMAREKIAN: No, no. We took in the two wire photographers and the official White House photographers and this was just done very briefly. They continued their luncheon as we walked in and circled the table and got several shots and went out again.

And we had had a particular request from one of the labor leaders who had hoped to get a picture of himself alone with the President. We didn’t encourage this too much because we had requests like this all the time, and if the President posed

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individually with all of his fifty guests, it would just be too time-consuming, but I don’t remember the name of the particular man. He was someone whom we thought the President might want to cooperate with. He was a fairly important man. Pierre suggested that I take it in and talk to his secretary and see if the secretary could catch him on his way to the luncheon and as I was—

MICHAELIS: Mrs. Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln]?

GAMAREKIAN: Yes. As I was talking to her about it, he walked in out of his office and got involved in the conversation and said he’d see if he could do it and would I have a photographer there, just outside the dining room in the Usher’s Office for the period preceding the lunch.

The understanding was, at least my understanding was, that this would be done perhaps before the luncheon sometime. We always took photographers over to get the formal luncheon picture during the coffee hour.

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When I got over there at the coffee hour, the little White House photographer had been sitting there for an hour and a half! And he hadn't had any lunch himself. I went in with my photographers, and the President still made no move to get this other picture and when I came out, I guess, Bob [Robert C. Knudsen], the White House photographer, said, "It looks as if we aren't going to get it," and I said something about, "No, it doesn't look as if we are going to get it," at which point I left! And I guess Bob left also.

MICHAELIS: Was this Bob Knudsen?

GAMAREKIAN: Bob Knudsen. Yes, but ten minutes later the President came out looking for him and he wasn't there, at which point he was rather upset! He was calling over to the White House trying to find him, finally located him and they got the picture but the President was upset with me because his understanding was that I was going to have

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the photographer standing by. Obviously a President should have what he wants when he wants it! I guess I hadn't understood that this was the case, and I hadn't made it clear to Bob in any case, but, as I said, this was what he was calling me about. I took the scolding, and I said something like I was sorry if there had been a misunderstanding. He was very sweet about it. He didn't proceed to make a big thing out of it, and our relations were very normal from that point on. I felt that it was something he instantly dismissed as soon as he had made his feelings known to me, but I can remember going back to the office and sort of floating there on a little pink cloud saying to everyone, "He knows my name! He knows my name!"

I was frankly, I guess, not too terribly upset at the scolding because it was the first time that I realized the President knew that my name was Barbara,

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which I'm afraid is the reaction of lots of people towards President Kennedy! He was a terribly attractive man and I think that most women found that if he smiled in their direction or said something that even indicated that he was personally aware of the fact that they had a name and they were an individual, it set you up for the next week or two.

MICHAELIS: Did he ever get mad in a devastating way where his own personal charm couldn't be a redeeming factor?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, I was never personally a witness to this. I knew he lost his temper occasionally. I was in Kenny O'Donnell's [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] office a couple of times when I just knew from the atmosphere and the President's expression that he was furious about something. When I asked about it later, I gathered that it was some kind of silly political kind of boo-boo where someone had just made a stupid mistake or had made a stupid decision which

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had gotten him terribly upset.

Another time I know when he was upset enough to the point where he was ready to fire someone was when we were on our trip to Europe this last summer, oh, a year ago this summer. It was the last trip he made to Europe when he went to Ireland and to Germany, to Berlin and to Italy.

We had a young girl in the office who was working for us for the summer. She was a college student. She was left back in Washington along with an older woman in the office who had been left in charge of the office with one other girl and the rest of the press office staff were on the trip. I was at the Irish Embassy when Dave Powers [David F. Powers] came up to Pierre and told him the President was just furious! He (the President) had gotten a phone call from Mimi [Mimi Beardsley Alford], the little girl who had been left back in the United States who was in tears and very upset because the older woman in our office,

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Helen Gans, had not permitted her to have that Friday off and that if the President were back in Washington, Dave said, Helen Gans would be fired this very instant. Dave was very upset about it and conveying all kinds of excitement to Pierre about it.

I thought it was utterly asinine to think that he would get so upset about a little girl in the office who wasn't able to get Friday off, that he was ready to fire someone.

MICHAELIS: How was Mimi able to get through to the President?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, obviously she did have sort of a special relationship with the President. I don't know quite what it was. To be able to place a call through the White House switchboard to Ireland from the United States and to get through directly to the President to make her complaint was a little unusual. It isn't that easy,

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normally, to get the President on the phone.

There were some cute, young, attractive girls who worked with us in the White House and who went swimming with Dave Powers and the President and went on trips, and Mimi turned up the following year when she was back in school on a trip to Nassau when the President met Macmillan [M. Harold Macmillan] and she also showed up in Palm Springs. Obviously she was flown out on one of the Air Force planes.

I don't know what the relationship was. It is one of these areas where I'm not anxious to know and I hadn't many opportunities to inquire. Most of these stories were told to me all second hand, and I think there are people who are no doubt going to be interviewed who can be a good deal more candid about this area of the President's life than I could be.

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It is enough to say that the White House press corps and the people working in the White House were very much aware that there were lots of fun and games going on. I often liked to think that as far as the President was concerned, he indulged in this all sort of vicariously and it was fun to have pretty girls around, and it was fun to watch his staff sort of make fools of themselves, but I don't really know.

MICHAELIS: But there were other Mimis, there were more than just one?

GAMAREKIAN: Yes, there were a couple of the girls who worked on the White House staff who had also worked on the campaign and who had a pretty close relationship with the President, with other staff members.

MICHAELIS: Wasn't there resentment when some of the girls went to swimming parties and others not? I mean it sounds like rather—

GAMAREKIAN: Resentment on the part of the other girls, you mean?

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MICHAELIS: Yes.

GAMAREKIAN: Well, of course most of the other girls who knew about it and would talk about it—their rationale was that even if they were asked, they wouldn't indulge in this sort of thing. But of course you never know how people will react to an invitation of that kind.

The thing that amazed me was that these young girls were very clubby. I say young girls; that in itself makes it sound like sour grapes. They were—well, Mimi was about 18 or 19, I guess. And—

MICHAELIS: In college?

GAMAREKIAN: In college. When she first came to us the first year she was a freshman. She had just completed her freshman year and she loved the summer job so she didn't want to go back to school. I guess her family told her she had to go back for another year, and she came and worked for us the following summer as well.

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The thing that amazed me so was that these two or three girls were great friends and bosom buddies and gathered in corners and whispered and giggled, and there seemed to be no jealousy between them, and this was all one great big happy party and they didn't seem to resent any interest that the President or any other men might have in any of the girls. It was a marvelous example of sharing, which I found very difficult to understand as a woman! I just

think that I would have found it difficult to enter into this kind of a relationship if I had been at all emotionally involved without having some very normal feelings of jealousy and possessiveness. But apparently this didn't enter into the relationship. They were the best of friends, and they all seemed to share the same—the same—

MICHAELIS: World outlook!

GAMAREKIAN: Yes. Apparently.

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MICHAELIS: How was it said that Mimi had met the President originally?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, she had graduated from—oh, dear, what is the school that Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] graduated from? The preparatory school? I can't think of the name of it. Mrs. Chapin's school?

MICHAELIS: Chapin.

GAMAREKIAN: She was the editor of her school newspaper, and following the campaign she thought it would be interesting to do an article on Mrs. Kennedy, since Mrs. Kennedy was now in the White House and an alumna of the school, and had written Mrs. Kennedy about the possibility of coming and seeing her and Tish Baldrige [Letitia Baldrige] had apparently arranged for Mimi to come down and spend some time in Washington, but Mrs. Kennedy's schedule was such that she was not able to see her personally.

I don't know if Tish was a graduate of Mrs. Chapin's but at any rate, Tish saw

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a good deal of Mimi and gave her a lot of background, enough material to do an article on Mrs. Kennedy, but apparently the President did meet her on this visit. He had more time than Mrs. Kennedy (chuckles). Barely.

And she was brought over and met the President. I don't know how much she saw of him but at any rate, while she was there she also met Priscilla [Priscilla Wear] who worked in the President's office and who was one of the younger girls. And I think she may have stayed with Priscilla while she was down here for the weekend, but I don't know how the job came about. Mimi's story was that she had had a note from Priscilla asking her if she would like to come and work in the White House that summer and I don't know who suggested it or how she ended up there, but that was how she made the original contact.

MICHAELIS: The other thing that does strike one as being rather extraordinary is why, of all

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places, to be in the Press Office which would presumably be the most conspicuous place to—

GAMAREKIAN: I suppose—

MICHAELIS: —be. Inside, the White House photographer—

GAMAREKIAN: Yes and you know a girl wasn't in the office very long before the press began to ask why she was there and what she was doing because Mimi had no skills. She couldn't type. She couldn't— She was a bright girl. She could answer the phone and she could handle messages and things but she was not really a great asset to us.

But there was great mobility in the Press Office. Whenever the President travelled, members of the press staff travelled as well. You always have a press secretary and a couple of girls travelling as well as a large contingent of newspaper people and it was, I think, easier. One of the other girls worked in our office and had been working there from the very

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beginning. She made almost all of the interesting trips and the trips are normally rotated among the girls. We all went on trips one time or another, but Mimi who obviously couldn't perform any function at all made all the trips!

So it made it very easy for them to move around, although even if they worked in another office, they still would have been able to go on trips. I don't know. I just think that there was always one more desk that you could find in the Press Office, and it was a busy office. You could almost always use another person. If you were going to use a girl who didn't type or didn't have any skills, probably the Press Office was as good as any place because our phones are insane. All six lines ring at the same time and if nothing else, you can use someone just to take phone calls and look up things in the files, and cut the ticker and that sort of thing.

[-25-]

And this is what Mimi did. And in another office where you would have a lot more substantive work I just don't know what she would have ended up doing.

MICHAELIS: Well, just one more obvious question that probably ought to go in the record and maybe you have answered it already. Was the President himself aware of the rumors in the White House press corps?

GAMAREKIAN: I don't know how he could help but be. He wasn't, obviously he wasn't, a stupid man and I'm sure he must have realized that this all didn't go unnoticed because, although for instance when—I wasn't in

Nassau but Pierre and Chris Camp [Christine Camp], and a couple of the other girls were, and the only reason they knew that Mimi was in Nassau, and this was that following January, was because as the entourage of cars pulled up in front of the house to pick up the President and take him to the plane and go on to Palm Beach where he was going to

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spend the holidays, in the two cars immediately following the President they saw the top of a little head over the door and they thought there was a little child sitting in the front seat of the car! And Chris said to Pierre, “Who could that child be?” And they walked over and looked in the car and here seated on the floor was Mimi! Now it’s just stupid to— The whole thing doesn’t make sense. Here she was sitting on the floor of a car so she wouldn’t be seen by anyone. She’d been there, apparently, for several days.

They took one look and sort of backed away and didn’t say anything. But of course the press corps—I don’t think saw Mimi in Nassau, but they certainly did in Palm Springs because it was a member of the press who told me she was out there and again she must have gone in on the “back-up” plane. I don’t know who arranged for it. It could have been another staff

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member. It could have been one of the special assistants who was interested in Mimi and flew her down to Nassau. I don’t know. That’s why I think I’m reluctant to—

MICHAELIS: That’s why I was asking you the question about President Kennedy because it seems to me with all the world pitched to the Christine Keeler case, it does seem quite extraordinary that with his own sense of public relations, he would take such a chance.

GAMAREKIAN: A lot of the press corps thought that this was going to blow up eventually. This is the sort of thing that legitimate newspaper people don’t write about or don’t even make any implications about. It was kind of a big joke. Everyone knew about it and there were a lot of sly remarks made. And everyone knew. People talked on two levels all the time. You knew what they were referring to, but of course, I think they jumped to a lot of conclusions on the basis

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of just putting lots of things together, but I—

MICHAELIS: Well, that’s really, I guess, my question. Since the situation was an ambiguous one, was President Kennedy at all aware of trying to make it less ambiguous. Maybe he himself wasn’t implicated in it. Who knows? But just on the face of what you say about the general knowledge—

GAMAREKIAN: I think that, to begin with, he must have felt that his position was pretty secure and that there was no possibility that this would ever hit print. I would think that when all this business happened in Great Britain that they would all begin to rethink a little bit about: “it is possible that all this may someday emerge in a black headline”—but I couldn’t see that there was any great change in the way things were done following the headlines in Great Britain.
He may have thought that the press

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corps just was not as aware of these things as they were. I don’t really know how much thought he gave to it but I—

MICHAELIS: What happened to her?

GAMAREKIAN: She’s married. Mimi’s now married. She married a boy who graduated from Williams College. I understand that people do want these interviews to be candid and to discuss all aspects of the presidency and his life and, although I don’t know that much about this aspect, it certainly is something I couldn’t help but be aware of working in the White House. And—

MICHAELIS: And that, undoubtedly, is important.

GAMAREKIAN: And certainly it is something that I never discussed because if you are working for the Administration, you feel a loyalty to it. It is the sort of thing you don’t discuss, something you profess complete ignorance of when you attend the inevitable cocktail parties where this is the subject

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for discussion. But I was told by a reporter who worked for Paris Match who was also a friend of Mrs. Kennedy’s and who was here in Washington and was taken on a tour around the White House by Mrs. Kennedy. She walked into Mrs. Lincoln’s office and said hello to Mrs. Lincoln, and Priscilla was sitting there. Mrs. Kennedy turned to him and said, “This is the girl who supposedly is sleeping with my husband” in French; and he was utterly taken back by this. And who would have thought a Frenchman would be surprised at this sort of statement! And I’ve always wondered why Mrs. Kennedy said this. Whether she thought since she was talking to a Frenchman, this was something he would understand and accept or whether she was trying to shock him or whether she was bitter enough so that this just came out.

At any rate, this was told me by this French correspondent who said, “What is going on here?” You know. And—

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MICHAELIS: What was his reaction? Was she bitter? Was her tone bitter or was it underplayed?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, he—

MICHAELIS: Was it a line thrown away?

GAMAREKIAN: I think he thought she said it somewhat facetiously and sort of threw it away. And of course my reaction too was, “No matter how little French you know,” and I knew Priscilla knew some, “I certainly would recognize a few works like ‘sleep’ and ‘girl’ and ‘my husband’!” I’m sure Priscilla must have realized what Mrs. Kennedy said.

So this sort of thing would happen and you would hear about it. I don’t know. It is probably the kind of thing that people will speculate on for a good many years.

MICHAELIS: Well, it is probably an anti-climax to go from that to the administration of the Press Office, but you did say that President Kennedy really had a very informal and open-door policy about the way people were assigned to jobs and his own relation of

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coming in and taking over when, for example, about the time you were talking to Mrs. Lincoln. Were there any other incidents of that sort that would point up just how fluid the Press Office was?

GAMAREKIAN: It was a very relaxed, informal administration. People worked with their doors open and they were more apt to pick up a phone and run down the hall, rather than dictate a memo on something. And this was true of the President as well. He worked with his door to his garden open.

Early in the spring and late in the fall he seemed to enjoy just the feeling of the out of doors and I think he sometimes felt he was out of doors if he could keep that door open! He would wander out into the garden frequently with guests, and I can remember when Dobrynin [Anatoly Fedorovich Dobrynin] was there. He took him out in the garden and they were sitting out on a little bench talking. And he would frequently do this with guests.

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Just wander around himself, around the grounds and sit on a bench or stand in the garden and chat if it were a pleasant day.

The door to his secretary’s office, the door between his office and his secretary’s office, was open, as well as her door was open to the hall.

Of course this is the only Administration I ever worked in the White House with, and I don’t know what is customary. I would suspect, though, that most administrations just were not this informal nor people this accessible.

Mrs. Lincoln kept chocolates on her desk and you found that everyone from mail boys to special assistants would wander in for a piece of candy. The President's desk faced the open door so that he would catch a glimpse of people wandering in and out frequently, and he would use her office to place phone calls or receive phone calls or stand at her desk dictating so that he was

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in view a good deal of the time. People would see him about a good deal, and he would catch glimpses of you as you were coming along and you would be summoned into his office to be asked about something or it was very easy for someone like Salinger or Bundy [McGeorge Bundy] who had a quick question to simply pop their head into Mrs. Lincoln's office, stick their heads around the door to see if he were busy and catch his eye and ask a question. They didn't have to be formal and call and make an appointment.

So there was a lot of mobility. He didn't wander around the West Wing. The first week or two I think he wandered a good deal just to find out who was there and what they were doing and in what area they were sitting.

I bumped into him once during the first day or two. He was pretty lost. There is a complex little area where you'd keep going around in circles and you'd keep

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ending up in the same place and you can go through five different doors and find yourself in the same room. He was trying to get back to the Press Office and was way over on the other side of the Wing. But at night—oh, I think after the pressure of the day he would sometimes wander around and sit and chat with Kenny or Ralph Dungan or would, quite often, after eight o'clock at night, wander into the Press Office if Pierre was still there to ask him a question. Or you would hear his voice in the back hall saying, "Pierre?"

And if Pierre weren't there after eight o'clock, or if you were in the office doing something, he'd wander in and read a clipping or— And he'd constantly pick up books off desks and disappear with them. He'd find something on Pierre's desk that would interest him and he'd wander off over to the House with it, and Pierre would come in the next day and scream at everyone,

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trying to find out who took his book, and he'd finally decide it was the President, and call over to the House and ask George Thomas, his valet, if such and such a book were on the President's bedstand, and sure enough, there it would be! So we'd get it back. So nothing was really safe. He'd just poke around a good deal and this is true, I think, of other members of the staff at the White House. They were all young and informal. One of the girls who had been at the White House for something like twenty-five years and had been there through several administrations, whom I don't know well, met me the other day and said she missed the atmosphere so and missed some of the people. She said the three years were so

completely different from any other period she'd been in the White House. And she said something which I think probably pinpoints it. She said they were all so great to work with.

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Here were all these young men so close to the seat of power and so influential and powerful themselves but they didn't take themselves too seriously. And I think this is a bit of the atmosphere. They weren't undisciplined people. They worked hard. They all had a great respect for the presidency and for the President, and there was always enough of a remoteness about him and an aloofness that you didn't infringe upon the fact that he was accessible and that he was informal. You still didn't take advantage of this and treat him like "Jack Kennedy," the boy around the corner. He was still the President.

And yet, the members of the staff, everyone, was on a first-name basis. Secretaries who had worked there for years were calling their bosses by their first names, and I'm sure they hadn't done this before.

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And there was a great air of fun about everything. People worked hard and they certainly realized the seriousness of what they were doing and the responsibility they had, but they didn't take themselves seriously! And they could see the humor in a situation.

We had a party for Dave Powers on his birthday.

MICHAELIS: What year was that?

GAMAREKIAN: This was just about a year before the President's death. It was not in the first two years of the Administration. It was held in the Cabinet room—a surprise for Dave. In fact, they tried to keep Dave out of the Cabinet Room, but he went in and saw a cake and coffee cups, and the President was meeting with a fairly large-size group of people, about thirty, and Dave was told that the President had ordered cake and coffee for his guests! At which point Dave told the White House photographer to take

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a picture of him with all this cake and the coffee cups. He said, "I'll have it printed up and take it home to my wife and tell her that they gave me a party at the White House!" He didn't realize that they really were going to give him a party.

I can remember that the party was great fun. There must have been a hundred people there. In fact, the President first went in and said, "Where are the Secret Service?" And so the Secret Service, except those that were on duty, were brought in. They hadn't been asked, but he noticed this immediately and asked that they be included in the party. But there were people from the messenger unit, and from mimeographing, and quite a mixed group of people who worked in the White House, and it was very gay. They had funny, silly telegrams

to Dave from world visitors on his birthday, and the President enjoyed it immensely. Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] had written a funny poem. The President

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had to leave after fifteen minutes or so, but the moment he left you could just feel perceptively the tension lessening and everyone began to relax and it became rather gay and the volume rose by several decibels.

Apparently he did what he had to do and came back into the Cabinet Room again, and the constraint of some of the people was very apparent, and it was apparent to him as well and I thought at the time, how sad! He really, I think, was enjoying himself hugely and would have liked to have stayed and mingled for a while and just relax a bit. But he realized that whenever he walked into the room, people stood back a bit and sort of stood in semi-circles and didn't say much and kept watching him. Because he was of great interest to them and they were terribly interested in seeing what he was going to say and do, but also there was this constraint because you just didn't relax and drink your champagne quite

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as loudly as you would if the President were not there. So he only stayed a moment or two and left again. I'm sure this had something to do with it.

We read so much about the presidency and the fact that he is such a lonely man. I think that it is obviously true. It is nothing new to have it pointed out but I—

MICHAELIS: But this is a very nice distinction between informality and yet, even with a very informal situation, and the whole atmosphere—you still feel that the reserve is always there.

GAMAREKIAN: Yes, there was very definitely the element of knowing that this was the President and he was a man you respected and honored and were a bit in awe of. On the other hand, the atmosphere generally was that of a very relaxed, informal atmosphere, in which I think people could work well and easily and they worked long hours.

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MICHAELIS: How about his ceremonial functions with foreign students and with—

GAMAREKIAN: Well, a good many of his appointments were primarily that of a ceremonial nature where he had to receive guests because traditionally the President did. He saw a good many rather large-size groups in the Rose Garden or in smaller groups in his office.

When he met with groups in the Rose Garden he usually came out and said a few words. And he would stride out and sometimes make eloquent remarks without a note in his hand, and, I think, lots of times didn't think in terms of making a major speech. These were

not major speeches but he would come out and speak very informally at a mike without using notes and establish immediately a rapport with the audience. I'm sure there are lots of groups and people who came here who were not strong Kennedy advocates but who were completely won over

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by him as a person because he had great humor; and lots has been written about his use of humor. He was very ironic. His humor often was at his own expense, but he used it very successfully, just had his audiences in stitches at times!

And if you listen to anyone often enough, and I think I've probably listened more to John F. Kennedy than any other speaker I've ever known, you get so that a lot of the phraseology is familiar. The stories are familiar. The jokes are familiar. It is so easy to indulge in clichés but the President was never trite. You never got tired of listening to him. Some of the stories were familiar, but he had a marvelous gift for words. Sometimes he would not say anything new or imaginative, but just the way he presented it or phrased it, he clothed it in new words so that sort of an old truth suddenly took on new meaning. That sounds corny, and I don't know quite

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how to say it better than that, but you'd find yourself sometimes standing there and you'd be startled to suddenly think, "That's right," or "That is so true." Yet he didn't use a trite way in which to express it. He hated, I think, the clichés. I think that he was a very gifted man in being able to say things in unusual ways.

He was especially good with students. He spoke to a good many foreign students. He had quite a few Latin American students at times. I remember one group of students from Brazil who spoke English but who had a bit of a language problem, and after he spoke to them he asked if they had any questions. And I think he must have remained for a good half-hour or forty-five minutes talking with them informally. He had so much patience with them because I can remember this one group—they were almost rude in some of their questions. They asked him things which even a hardened

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White House press man would be reluctant to ask the President of the United States, or just the way that they phrased the question was almost an affront. And yet he didn't take offense. He was very patient with them. He went to great pains to try to explain himself and to explain the policies of the United States Government, and ended up, I think, with great rapport with the youngsters and I think that they left with probably a reawakened and perhaps, I hope, a rather changed viewpoint of what the United States was and what they were trying to do.

MICHAELIS: Barbara, you said you had several rather amusing incidents that took place while you were in the White House that illuminated President Kennedy's behavior and personality.

GAMAREKIAN: Yes, there were a number of amusing things that happened at various times that I thought were very human and rather endearing at times.

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I remember that first spring after we were in the White House. The President was supposed to throw out the opening ball on the opening day of the baseball season in Washington, which is traditional with all Presidents. I was walking over from the Mansion to the West Wing and came across the President in the Rose Garden practicing throwing a soft ball. Obviously he hadn't intended anyone seeing him out there and so he felt sheepish about it all and ducked his head and said "hello."

I was vastly amused by it because I think that, like most other people, I have been aware of the fact that the Kennedys are such enthusiasts when it comes to any kind of sports. We hear so much about the touch football. And I also think that your image of the Kennedys are people with lots of self-confidence and who would never have to go out and practice anything, especially throwing a soft ball. But obviously, as

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you say, he just wanted to get the throwing arm loosened up a bit.

He was out there practicing and the next day the newspapers reported that the President had thrown the ball further than any president since 1802 or something! Obviously it paid off, this little bit of practicing.

MICHAELIS: His usual drive for excellence, too.

GAMAREKIAN: Yes. Another rather amusing incident. The President used to talk, as I said earlier, to fairly large-size groups in the Rose Garden and he, following his talk to them, would frequently say rather grandly, "Would you like to take a tour of the White House?" At this point they'd get terribly excited, and they'd love to take a tour of the White House and he would turn and say, "Barbara, will you take care of this then?"

The first time he did this it was much to our dismay because we had made no preparations and, at the height of the

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tourist season, there are all kinds of people who are going through and it is difficult to even squeeze one more individual in, much less seventy-five unexpected visitors and we were running around like mad trying to make arrangements. We got so we were prepared for this invitation that he would extend, and had the routine pretty much set up so that we could get

these people on the tour. But he met me in the hall, oh, three or four months after he'd begun extending these invitations and said, "Oh, Barbara, I've been meaning to ask you something! When I ask people or invite people to take the White House tour, what happens to them? Do they have to go to the end of the line?"

I proceeded to explain that no, they got in at the beginning of the line and they had an escorted tour, but I found that a little amusing, too, to think that he was sort of grandly making this opportunity available to them but he wasn't quite sure

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just what happened to them after they disappeared from the Rose Garden, whether we took good care of them or not!

MICHAELIS: What did depend on whether he invited them to take the tour? Was there any particular criteria? Was it a matter of a very sympathetic group or—?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, it got so that this began to be a part of the ceremony. But I think that this happened very impulsively probably the first time or two when he was with a group that was responsive and seemed to enjoy him and he enjoyed them and it was a lovely day and we should all look at the White House together. That sort of thing. He was just sort of expansive and felt good, I think, and thought it would be pleasant for them to see the White House, and frequently they were people who were in Washington as visitors for just a short time and hadn't had an opportunity or would not have another opportunity. It was, I

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think, just a bit of hospitality on his part. Then, of course, it got so that he did it fairly frequently. It worked out so well and the response was always so good.

Also, it was a graceful way to end his little speech or whatever it might be. Sometimes it was a little difficult to break away from these groups. He would almost always, at the end of saying a few words, sometimes they would be fairly lengthy or sometimes fairly brief, he would almost always go down in the group and greet people and shake hands and meet a good many of them personally. It was then sometimes difficult to extricate himself from all these eager people who had a few more things to say so it would simplify things to return to the microphone and say, "It was so good to see you here. Perhaps some of you would like to take a White House tour. If you are interested, Miss Gamarekian,

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or someone, will take care of it."

I think it just evolved into one of those things which was done.

MICHAELIS: Did his expansiveness continue throughout the entire three-year period because certainly, in the early days, he was extraordinarily expansive and seemed to—?

GAMAREKIAN: Yes, it did; I think that there were days when his schedule would just not permit him to do this, when there were pressures which we did not know about. He would come out and go through the paces but would return very promptly to his office.

I think sometimes it would depend upon his mood, although he was not a moody man. At least I saw very few indications of moodiness on his part. He showed great patience with some groups. He would sometimes be introduced by, for instance, an ambassador from another country who would speak for five minutes in introducing him which was entirely unnecessary. The group

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was there primarily to see the President and they were, I suppose, wasting the President's time, but he did not show his impatience at this. He was very good with them.

I think it was an innate courtesy on his part because he was, as you know, a man also with a very short attention span and who didn't "suffer fools lightly." I think on most occasions, a social occasion or any other occasion, it would be difficult for him to sit and talk with someone he found dull or uninteresting.

He didn't find it productive to spend a good deal of time with those kind of people but he also did have a courtesy and patience which would not permit him to show the fact that he was bored or upset. And this would happen frequently where people would get terribly expansive and go on and on and the President would stand there waiting for them to finish before he said a few words.

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He would generally, I would say, when he met groups in the Rose Garden, move around among them and take a bit more time than was necessary. And it would depend a good deal on who the group was, sometimes, and how interesting they were, and how responsive they had been.

Also I can remember that occasionally we would meet in the Rose Garden when it would be just slightly drizzling. They would have groups large enough so that we'd have no place to put them and we hadn't had enough time to make any other plans or it would begin raining at the last minute. On the steps outside the Rose Garden there was a spot where a microphone could be screwed in two different places. One, up under the portico and the other down on a low platform just a step or two above the heads of his audience. And I was reading just recently the story of planning the Garden of the White House. He designed the

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steps and it was said that he said that he wanted it so that he could be low enough so that he could be part of the group that he was speaking to, but he would have the steps behind him elevated enough so that the people he was honoring would be standing behind him at a higher level. I hadn't realized that anything like this had gone into building these steps, but we had put the microphone up under the portico in this upper position so that he wouldn't get wet.

And I remember the day when we were trying to decide where to put the microphone and finally decided that there was no point in the President getting wet too, so we put it up high. He normally was down at the lower microphone. Then he came out and just strode by the microphone and didn't use it and said, "Let's get wet together." And there were just little things like this which obviously were the sure touch of the man who knows what his audience likes. And

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he stood there in this slight drizzle for ten minutes and talked to them and moved around.

He was rather unpredictable in the sort of things that he would do. He seemed to know what an audience would like and would do the sort of thing which impulsively occurred to him to do at the moment.

I can't remember when we first started talking about this, what the point of—?

MICHAELIS: Well, one thing that came in the earlier interview was that occasionally he would have pains in his back. And he would have to submit himself to—

GAMAREKIAN: Oh, yes, he would have bad days when his back would bother him a good deal. I would always be aware of it. Sometimes a Secret Service man would tell me that he was having trouble with his back that day.

But I can remember one day when I knew that his back was bothering him. It was one of these occasions when the introduction went

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on and on and on. He must have stood there fully for ten or fifteen minutes. Or it may not have been an introduction; it may have been a response to what he had to say. And I was standing on an angle where I was slightly behind him to the side, so I could see him sort of easing the back, using his hands. I knew what his problem was, but it was—I'm sure that there were many occasions like this when he had a full and heavy schedule and the things he had to do were—he had to stand patiently, although his back was killing him. He had no other choice and I think that he had learned to live, obviously, with that kind of pain.

MICHAELIS: Stoical. What about the incident of the paintings? His paintings.

GAMAREKIAN: Oh, yes, this was another amusing story, I think, because the President, at the time of his operation on his back when he was a senator, was going through a long period of recovery and apparently Mrs. Kennedy

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introduced him to painting, and he was doing some painting to wile away the hours. And one of the magazines, I think it was Parade Magazine, came out with a story on him and various other well known people who did some amateur painting and among other people they had a few paragraphs on the President and the story about the President and his painting. They had a reproduction of one of his paintings, and it was a very gay, colorful sea scene of a sail boat. It was extremely attractive and fun. They also included the comments of several critics, art critics, who proceeded to say very nice things about the painting and the fact that the President had shown a real knack for this kind of thing.

And we were immediately deluged at the Press Office with all kinds of inquiries and requests for more samples of the President's art work. This had gone on for a day or so, and I was at work rather late one

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night and had to go into Mrs. Lincoln's office with something and the President called me in and said, "Barbara, come in here a minute. I want to ask you about something."

I walked in and Kenny O'Donnell and Pierre Salinger were standing there and reclining against the President's desk were these two paintings on the floor, and I knew immediately they must be his. Neither one of them were very good. I know really nothing about art but it didn't take anything more than an amateur to realize that they were rather poor attempts. The perspective on the one was just completely off. It was a street scene. The street didn't do anything the way it was supposed to do it. The President didn't tell me who had done it or didn't volunteer any information whatsoever. He simply said, "What do you think of these two paintings?"

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And I said, "Well, I like the one on the left," and he said, "Oh, do you? Do you really like that one?"

And I said, "Well, in preference to the one on the right." At which point he turned to Pierre and said, "I knew they were no good!"

And, of course, we never did release any more of his paintings but I thought this was very human, this feeling that, "Golly, maybe I do have a little talent and it would be sort of fun to see these things published." And he was getting so many requests for them. I think that maybe his inclination was to let a few more of them be printed, yet he suspected they weren't really very good. All he needed was someone to say, "Well, they are really awful!"

So I think that his reputation is still intact on the basis of the one painting we had printed, which was really sort of gay and fun.

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MICHAELIS: It was sort of revealing of Pierre Salinger that he didn't have—

GAMAREKIAN: I don't know what the conversation—

MICHAELIS: That he hadn't gotten in on an earlier, on a more awkward situation.

GAMAREKIAN: Another amusing incident which shows a little bit of the President's relationship with photographers too. In our first trip to Europe when he spent some time with deGaulle [Charles A. de Gaulle], the first picture session with President deGaulle was a hectic one with all kinds of photographers. They must have had at least fifty or sixty crowding around in everyone's way and great chaos and the President said to one of the photographers, "You've got the lens cap on your camera!" At which point the grateful photographer removed it, but this was a story that went the rounds among all photographers for a long time.

He had a good relationship with them. They liked him and he recognized, I think, what their problems were in terms of timing

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and how much time they needed to get a decent picture, and he usually didn't terminate the picture sessions himself which some presidents do. Some presidents just get up and walk away, or turn their back, or very brusquely say, "That's enough fellows;" but he was very good with them.

MICHAELIS: Who did terminate camera sessions?

GAMAREKIAN: I was supposed to go in and say "lights," which would terminate the session. That was one of my jobs. He usually left it up to me.
There was another amusing incident when the photographers had been on a trip and they had some trouble getting their film back to Washington or back to New York.

MICHAELIS: Was that the Paris trip?

GAMAREKIAN: No, this was a trip some place in the South where the President went down to watch some Air Force maneuvers. It was a two-day trip of some kind.

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The film was to be shipped from an Air Force base by a special plane going directly to New York to get it up there in time for the seven o'clock news programs that night, and there had been some sort of a mix-up so that the film had never gotten out on time.

The news photographers had come in the next day at work when they were all back in Washington and had been complaining bitterly to Pierre and to anyone else who would listen, that there had been a foul-up. You know, what had happened? And why hadn't this worked

out better than it had? And Pierre wasn't too cooperative at this point. He had other things on his mind and no one was paying much attention to photographers' complaints because you have too many problems today to worry about the problems that happened yesterday!

We went in for a picture in the early morning and the President said to one of the photographers, "Did you get any good

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pictures yesterday, Tom?" or something to that effect. And Tommy Craven [Thomas J. Craven, Jr.] proceeded to say, "A lot of good they did! We never got them up. They never got shipped out in time. There was a goof-up or something."

At which point, the President immediately picked up the phone and got Pierre on the line. By the time we got back to the office, Pierre had already had a phone call from the President asking what had gone wrong with all these press arrangements to get film back to New York? And, within an hour or two, we had the answer to what the foul-up had been and what the problem had been, and the photographers just loved it. They thought the President was on their side, and if they had any complaints, they should take them directly to the President rather than to the Press Secretary!

MICHAELIS: Were there any policies that were laid down that you had to implement about what

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was possible to take or what not?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, most of the photo sessions were photo sessions out in the Rose Garden, or the President's office, or the Cabinet Room or the Fish Room. The photographers and press were not able to wander around in these areas without an escort, primarily because of security.

But whenever something for photographers was scheduled they would go under escort to wherever the photo session was to take place. So you didn't have a problem of photographers just wandering around taking any kinds of pictures whenever they felt like it. But there were no hard and fast rules about the photo session we had set up. They could move around in the Rose Garden and shoot the back of the President or almost any other angle they wanted to. There were no hard and fast ground rules about what they could not photograph.

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The only problem was what kind of pictures they could take of the family and of the children. If the children and Mrs. Kennedy were at any of these ceremonies—at any of the arrival ceremonies—there was always the problem of whether there were going to be any restrictions about whether pictures could be made of them. They would often be watching from windows and the cameramen would have long-lens cameras with them. But it was

decided that as long as they were within view, there was really no way in which to restrict photographers, and they were permitted to take pictures of this kind. The only other understanding that we had was when Mrs. Kennedy and the children would wander around the south grounds and use the south grounds for recreation and for play. The children had their play school outside their nursery school, and we did run into a problem originally with a lot of photographers

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taking pictures beyond the fence with long-lens cameras which meant that they were completely under the scrutiny of the camera whenever they moved around outside, which wasn't fair to them. It didn't give them any privacy, and it isn't a very relaxed feeling to feel that wherever you go you are the subject of whatever a camera might want to pick up.

But Pierre did talk with the wire services about this. They were the people primarily who were getting this kind of a picture, and we did establish some ground rules, that they would leave the family alone and not take pictures from beyond the fence of the family as they pursued their private activities.

MICHAELIS: Well, you said that they didn't, that in fact there were some breaches of that.

GAMAREKIAN: Oh, every once in a while we would have a photographer who just couldn't resist a shot and, in fact, one of the pictures which

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was taken of Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] with her nursery group, showed her bending over the swing, peering into the face of another child. It was just an adorable picture and ended up winning one of the prizes of the White House Correspondents' Association photo awards at the end of the year.

When this appeared in the paper, after supposedly there were ground rules that this kind of picture not be taken, then of course the President was upset and Mrs. Kennedy was furious, and we had a great to-do about it! We had wires on the phone. We were talking to the photo desks about it and Pierre was sort of in the middle. He was the one who had to express the President's displeasure for this sort of thing and then, much to our dismay, two days later we did get a request from Mrs. Kennedy for a print of the picture. The picture which we had just raised hell about two days before!

So that it was a little difficult

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sometimes trying to establish hard and fast ground rules about the kind of pictures you didn't want taken when two days later you'd order a print of the picture.

MICHAELIS: And wasn't there some resentment on the part of the wire services that the—

GAMAREKIAN: Yes, they thought, I think, that some of the glossies, some of the slick publications like Life and Look, did get lots of exclusives. They were permitted sometimes to get an evening at the White House at a state dinner. Pictures were normally not permitted at state dinners or at some of the other social functions, but they would give exclusives to Life and Look and Time and they also had some family pieces. The photographers spent a week up on the Cape and did a picture series of President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy and the children—all of the Kennedy children.

MICHAELIS: Out of a personal friendship with a photographer or just a—?

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GAMAREKIAN: Well, there had been a relationship established there. They knew the photographer [Stanley Tretick] well and the woman [Laura Bergquist] who was doing the article was a woman who had worked on the campaign with the President and had established her relationship there so that when these requests came through, they knew that the picture story would be in the hands of people who were sympathetic to them and would probably do a picture story which would present them as a—. Well, they are a very photogenic family. To begin with, it would really be rather difficult not to do something which would be flattering to them and which would present a favorable image and a very appealing sort of thing. But this was part of it. When the request came in from someone they knew, I'm sure it was much easier for them to comply than it would have been if a completely unknown stranger from another publication had asked for this same kind of story.

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But we had a ceremony at the White House one day in which the President was going to come out and speak to a group of people. John-John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.] was in Mrs. Lincoln's office. There are French doors in her office which open out onto the portico where the ceremony was to take place, and the President was a bit late. John-John was standing there at the window and the photographers started to take pictures of him.

I didn't see them actually take the pictures until they had already snapped several but I wasn't too concerned about it. My feeling was that so long as he was standing so much in view, it would be very difficult to keep them from taking the pictures, and we had had an understanding about these other ceremonies: if the children were there, there was no problem about taking pictures. If they didn't want the children's pictures taken, they shouldn't have them in view!

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But at any rate, I had a phone call when I got back to the office from one of the presidential aides who said that the President was very upset about the fact that the pictures had been taken. They wanted us to kill the pictures. I reported this to Pierre and—

MICHAELIS: Was that David Powers?

GAMAREKIAN: Dave Powers was the one who called me about it. I had had a slight discussion with Dave when he called, and I said I just didn't see how we, in conscience, could try to kill this picture of John-John when we knew that Look Magazine had been in and had been spending two weeks with the President.

Stan Tretick of Look Magazine had been in and had spent two weeks with the President and John-John doing a picture story on the President and his son and this was due to come out, I think, a week from the following Sunday. I thought that it would put us in

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a very awkward situation to try to kill a picture of John-John when Look was going to come out with a five-page spread of John-John!

I discussed this with Dave, but I said I would convey the message to Pierre and obviously Pierre was the one that was going to have to call. You don't have much luck, really, with trying to kill pictures and it doesn't and—

MICHAELIS: It just relieves feelings.

GAMAREKIAN: It is really better not to try.

Yes. I talked to Pierre but Pierre decided not to do anything about it; just kept his fingers crossed that it wouldn't be used. It wasn't used that day. This was a Friday. And the next the President was in New York on some sort of speaking engagement I was on the trip and Pierre, in the meantime, had gone off on a speaking engagement on the West Coast, so we had the Assistant Press Secretary, Mr. Kilduff [Malcolm M. Kilduff].

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Mr. Kilduff got me on the phone that early afternoon and wanted to know the full background of what had happened because the Star had run this picture and the President was just furious—at me, primarily—because Dave Powers had told him that the message had been conveyed to me that the picture should be killed and that I had said the children were fair game for photographers!

I had not actually said this. I had said something to the effect that the photographers had the understanding that they could shoot anything that they could see. That when they were out for ceremonies and the children were in view, they could shoot the children. I supposed that in repeating the story and in using this other terminology, I think that the President was properly incensed to think that a member of his staff had said his children were fair game as far as photographers went. It was sort of a tempest in a teapot. I sort of

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expected that when I got back in the office on Monday morning I might not be working with photographers, but it never did come up again.

I saw the President and was tempted to discuss it with him but decided that he just might not appreciate it. He is not the kind of man to hold grudges once something is settled. And I don't think that he would have particularly wanted my comment.

Oh, but the other comment that was interesting in regard to this sort of thing, when Dave said to me—well—. When I was talking about the fact that Look Magazine was coming out with this exclusive and the wires are covered there day after day, day after day and had never gotten a similar exclusive and yet we try to kill a picture of John-John when John-John was present at a public ceremony, Dave said to me, "Well, that's different. The President is going to be able to look over the pictures that

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are going to be in Look Magazine and be able to choose the ones that he wants run." And I know that this is true. They brought in pictures and the President was able to go through them and make a choice which ones would be used. Obviously, I think, there is valid criticism here when you agree to the kind of photo story in which you have final decision on what kind of pictures are going to be used. And I think that if this had been well known, although it probably has been suspected, there could be a lot of criticism and a lot of articles written about the kind of—

MICHAELIS: Interference of the press?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, you talk about news management and this falls in the same category: picture management, I suppose.

MICHAELIS: Were there any other incidents like that in which you might generalize about what the Kennedy policy was of the media, particularly photographic?

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GAMAREKIAN: Well, I think they probably had ambivalent feelings as we all do. For instance, Mrs. Kennedy, I know, detested this business of being subjected to photographers and yet I know that she, like all of us, enjoyed seeing pretty pictures of herself! And she always photographed beautifully.

I think that, not especially talking about Mrs. Kennedy or Mr. Kennedy, I think that this is true of everyone. I think that they like seeing attractive pictures and they like the end results many times, but this business of being subjected to photography is not much fun. And I think that generally there was much more photo coverage at the White House than there had been during the previous administration. I think that photographers were given access to a lot

more occasions than they had ever been during the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration, but they always have something to complain about, obviously.

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It is true, I think, that exclusives were given to some of the magazines and publications which dealt primarily in photographs and which reached a good many Americans. I think that it was very valuable, too, to the President. I'm sure he realized this and I think that a lot of these things were done very consciously.

MICHAELIS: Do you want to talk about the day of the Alabama crisis?

GAMAREKIAN: It was a rather interesting little incident, I thought.

I was able to play tennis on the White House courts when the Kennedys were out of town and weren't going to use the courts themselves, and I was playing there with some friends one Sunday afternoon when the first thing I knew a helicopter came over and I recognized the President's helicopter. And a couple of helicopters landed on the grounds.

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We proceeded to start packing up our things. We had been playing for an hour or two anyway, but I didn't know why he was coming back. It was a Sunday. I hadn't had the radio on or anything and had just read the morning papers. That sort of thing. Sunday morning papers from the news room of the night before.

As we started to pack up our things and leave, the President walked on down the winding driveway from the house along with Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne Billings].

MICHAELIS: Was this directly after—

GAMAREKIAN: He got off the helicopter and came walking down—

MICHAELIS: How far are the courts from this?

GAMAREKIAN: It was quite a distance. It is very close to the fence. It is a good little walk. I saw him coming and he sort of shouted, "Don't leave on our account," you know. "Continue to play."

He came down, and I introduced him to

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my friends. It was interesting to me because although I'd seen him frequently I didn't have an opportunity to see him in an informal, social situation where he was just utterly relaxed.

He was dressed in a tweed jacket, his eyes were twinkling, and he was just gay and relaxed. He was indulging in just small talk with friends, and we chatted about the conditions

of the courts, and finally he said, "When you get through with the game, you'd better stop by the office because I think we are going to have the press here this evening."

And I discovered later on that he had flown back because this was the day they had had the riots down in Birmingham and he ended up by going on the air that night on national TV.

But you would never have known from his attitude and his utterly relaxed conversation that he had come back to handle

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a crisis of major importance and he was going to have to make some very important decisions about what he, as Chief Executive, was going to have to do; and also what he was going to have to say to the American public on TV.

I think this is sort of indicative of how he was able to compartmentalize his life, take a nap in the middle of the afternoon, and yet come back and get to the problems on his desk utterly refreshed without having these things nag him and bother him when he was relaxed with friends or doing something divorced from the kind of problems that came across his desk each day.

MICHAELIS: How about the tape for the United Fund incident?

GAMAREKIAN: The President was taping an appeal for funds for the United Fund. This is something that all Presidents do each year, and we had set up a taping session for the first thing in the morning. Mr. Schlesinger [Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.] had prepared

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some remarks for him, some rather lengthy remarks, which the President had not seen.

One of the press officers was actually in charge of the whole operation but he was called away unexpectedly and asked me to be sure that the President got the prepared remarks and was ushered into the Cabinet Room, where this was going to take place, and was introduced to Mr. Weber, who was handling the taping for the United Fund.

But when I got in the Cabinet Room that morning I discovered that there were at least a dozen men who had accompanied Mr. Weber. They were all VIP-types. Most of them were on the Board of Trustees for United Fund but they were pretty important men in their own right. They were in private industry or with the Bank of America or something of this nature. So I was anxious to catch the President before he went in for the taping and alert him to the fact that there would be some rather important

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people in there whom he might like to say a few words to but, aside from that, I was supposed to give him the suggested remarks of what he was to say. This was being taped for TV.

He got over a bit late that morning and his second appointment of the day was with Her Royal Highness, the Princess Sobhana of Cambodia. This was the second appointment of the day and he got there just about in time for this appointment. Rather than keeping her waiting, he saw her immediately. It was primarily a courtesy call. She was visiting in Washington and came by to meet the President, and it was to be just a very brief little meeting.

His office is separated from the Cabinet Room by his Secretary's office, and I was waiting in Evelyn's office to catch him before he went in to the Cabinet Room.

The first thing I knew the door came popping open and here he came striding

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through with Princess Sobhana with him! He headed straight for the Cabinet Room. I was not able to catch up with him with the message, but trailed him in and introduced him to Mr. Weber. He introduced the Princess to Mr. Weber and further said to all these other gentlemen, "I thought the Princess would be interested in meeting you all and simply in seeing this operation because she heads up the Red Cross in Cambodia, and I knew that you'd all have a great deal in common and she'd be interested in knowing how this appeal for funds is made here in the United States, etc."

At which point the Princess sat down to watch this whole operation. She was going, of course, on a White House tour following all this and she had some protocol people from State who were coming. At which point the President brushed by me to go on around the other side of the room and said to me in a soft voice, "This is the Red Cross, isn't it?"

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And I said, "No, it is the United Fund!"

And fortunately the Red Cross is one of the agencies that makes up the United Fund appeal, so he wasn't quite that much off base but I'm sure they were a little uncertain as to just what the President was doing with this woman who was the head of the Red Cross from Cambodia!

So I gave him the couple pages of remarks and said, "Here are the suggested remarks that you make," which he had not seen before.

He sat down at the Cabinet table and said to the television technicians, "Will you give me just a moment?" And in probably sixty seconds or so he glanced through these suggested remarks. At which point he set them to one side and said, "All right, I'm ready now," and launched into probably a two-minute little speech about the United Fund without stumbling, without pausing, without searching for words, not using any

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materials that had been in the prepared remarks.

MICHAELIS: Not even in phrases?

GAMAREKIAN: No, not even in phrases. Obviously, in reading the prepared remarks it refreshed his memory as to just what United Fund was, what it did, what it hoped to do; he put it all in a completely different context, approached it differently, but he did an incredible job!

I know that the President was very capable when it came to speaking off the cuff, getting up and making stump speeches and talking to people without notes or without preparation; but I think that to sit down and do something like this for television when you know that this is going to be broadcast for three national networks, to millions of people and not to have any notes or any cards in front of you to refer to, and to do this without making one little error! It was an incredible performance.

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I think there are lots of television performers who wouldn't be able to do it who are used to that awful camera staring them in the eye.

But I thought that was an interesting insight into his ability to speak very smoothly and very well and very concisely and to the point. Often, even in a speech, you can ramble on and not necessarily stick to the point but you can't do that in a two-minute appeal for funds!

MICHAELIS: You said that he occasionally did use vulgar language with you, in a private situation?

GAMAREKIAN: I was just present once when he used a word which shocked me slightly, and I'm sure that he probably talked this way more frequently when he was sitting around a smoke-filled room with lots of men. But it was interesting to me because for a moment I saw this strictly kind of political pro, Kennedy, that you hear about—another aspect of this man who had so many different kinds of personalities.

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He certainly wasn't a vulgar man. He was a very couth person and refined and elegant person, really, who always had the right word at the right moment.

MICHAELIS: Barbara, you were saying that on November 22 you were in a department store and heard that President Kennedy had been shot and you came back to the White House. What was the situation there?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, I must have been back in the White House within fifteen minutes of when it first came in over the wire. I came into the lobby and there were already fifty or sixty newsman there.

There were two girls in the office who hadn't known anything about it. The first they knew about it was when they began getting phone calls from people who wanted to be cleared to come in and the first call they got they said, "Well, yes, we'll clear you, but there is nothing going on here at all. There is really no reason to come in."

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At which point they were told that it had just come over the wire that the President had been shot. So this was the first way that anyone in the Press Office in the White House heard about it.

MICHAELIS: These were press people who wanted to come in to be there?

GAMAREKIAN: Yes. So by the time I got back things were pretty chaotic. We had no words from them at all. We had on the television and we kept a continual watch of the ticker, but—

MICHAELIS: And Mr. Salinger was away.

GAMAREKIAN: Mr. Salinger was on his way to Japan. Mac was with the President. Andy Hatcher was still in Washington.

He left at noon time and said that he would call at four, and we just didn't expect him back. We didn't know where he was. We started putting in phone calls for him. We had him paged at several different places, and we just weren't able to locate him at all. I still don't know where he

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was. I never did ask him where he had been that afternoon! But he obviously was some place where he didn't get the news either because otherwise he would have been back in a very short time and he didn't show up until six o'clock that night. But we had some White House staff who came to the Press Office primarily because they thought this was where the news would be.

We tried to handle inquiries from the press, but we just weren't in a position to give them any more information than they already had. We didn't hear from them in Dallas.

MICHAELIS: Didn't Mr. Schlesinger, or Mr. Horsky [Charles A. Horsky] who came in, try to get in touch with Dallas?

GAMAREKIAN: Now, we didn't because I think our feeling was that obviously things were so chaotic out there and they were moving around so fast and must have had so many contingencies to take care of that if they felt there

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was any need to call us, or had anything to convey to us, they would call us. I think we all felt that we didn't want to bother them with a phone call.

All that they could do would be to confirm what was coming over the wire. We did finally get a call from Mac in which he confirmed the fact that the President was dead, but he couldn't talk any more than that.

But we were getting inquiries immediately from press who wanted to know if a plane was going to be set up to fly out there. Helicopters were landing and coming and going.

MICHAELIS: Who was making decisions about that sort of thing?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, actually the decision was going to be made out there as to whether—we did call Defense to have them have a plane ready to go but the question was whether President Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] was going to fly back immediately

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to Washington, and this was decided within the hour, so we cancelled that. But a lot of this was handled by transportation office on sort of a contingency basis. Now many reporters packed on the contingency basis, but we had really no final word until we had a call from them saying they were on their way back and—

Well, our problem was we were without a press secretary, and there were all kinds of questions. The press heard helicopters out in the back—you could hear them. Where were they going to go? And whom were they picking up? And we had a man in the office who didn't want to make decisions about what to say, and there were other White House staff members who were advising him not to say anything about who it was.

MICHAELIS: Who was that?

GAMAREKIAN: It was Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy]—Senator Kennedy—and his sister who were going to fly up to Hyannis to be with their father and I was, in the

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end, the one who said, "It's foolish not to tell them." I told the man who was in our office to tell the press that this was what was happening. No one wanted to make any decisions about what to tell the press or not to tell the press because no one had had the experience of handling press and knew what to tell them. And, as far as I could see, there was no great secret about the fact that the Senator and his sister were going to fly to Hyannis and you couldn't say, "A helicopter hadn't come and we didn't know who was leaving."

So it was a hectic afternoon and then we had to make arrangements for coverage for Johnson when he came in that night. And then he came by helicopter to the White House. We had to make arrangements for press coverage out there. By this time, Mr. Hatcher was back and was taking over some of the details. I was there that night and the following morning until four,

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until the President's body was returned.

The whole three-day period was an incredible time. I don't think we've ever had a busier time and we had people, correspondents and newsmen and photographers from all over the world descending upon us.

We never worked under such pressure; and people had suffered, obviously, a personal loss. It all had affected us all one way or another. We had all worked with this man. We all had obviously emotional ties to him and to the Administration. And the reporters also were intensely emotional about it—the press corps.

But this was a period when I have never known people to work so well together. The press were so considerate and thoughtful and everyone who you worked with during this three-day period when you suddenly had more pressures than you had to bear before—(End of Track One)

Well, the whole news operation is so

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chaotic and there is no rhyme nor reason to it lots of times, and this was a period when there were an incredible number of people. The telephone lines were ringing, you had five or six people standing at your elbow, you were trying to get answers to questions on a number of different things. Half of these inquiries they were making we didn't have the answers on yet. All kinds of people—

MICHAELIS: What kind of inquires?

GAMAREKIAN: The funeral arrangements. What kind of coverage there was going to be and the arrangements at the church and the arrangements going to the Capitol and back. Oh, there were press arrangements that you had to take care of on all these movements and this—

MICHAELIS: Wasn't Salinger responsible for making those, in consultation with Mrs. Kennedy?

GAMAREKIAN: Yes. And obviously they were all unique problems. It was something we had never

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dealt with before. And decisions had to be based, not necessarily, on past practices; and as I said, you had a lot of foreign correspondents there. Physically you almost could not handle the press corps—Pierre couldn't brief in his office so he would go in the lobby and stand on a desk and you'd have four or five hundred reporters and photographers there and—

MICHAELIS: How could you be sure that they were all accredited?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, this was one of our major problems: getting them accredited and vouched for, and people who had come into town whom we had never heard of before. We just couldn't give free access to the White House to these people who called up and said they were so and so from such and such a place. You had to clear them with their embassies and the State Department. But normally, in the course of a day in the White House Press Office, people get irritated enough at

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each other. It is terribly demanding, the kind of office where people are asking silly questions and you have five or six things which have to be decided at one time, and it is very easy to lose patience and be short with individuals; and the press gets upset with us, and we get upset with the press, and we get upset with each other. It isn't that bad, actually, but all of the problems were multiplied a hundred times and yet people were incredibly patient, and I don't think that in that three-day period I heard one person rant or rave or scream or even speak sharply to another! Everyone seemed to be terribly aware of the demands and pressures on everyone else, and I think that everyone was also going through enough emotional turmoil so that they had great appreciation for the problems that faced everyone else and to me it was an incredible experience. It was one of the of golden spots I like to look back on in this whole

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period of working with the press. Because I would have said it would have been impossible under these circumstances to have so much rapport working together and working things out together and doing it with understanding and patience. And obviously, it was because everyone felt this great sense of personal loss, and suddenly were terribly aware of the fact that everyone's terribly human, and there was a certain fragility of the human spirit and the human body which no one can guarantee, and we were all sort of preserving it with each other. It was a very heartwarming kind of experience.

MICHAELIS: How about the press from communist countries? Were courtesies extended to them: Tass and that sort of thing?

GAMAREKIAN: Yes. We do. You usually don't rant and rave at Tass anyway. You are always a bit more formal with them and more helpful to them.

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A couple of the White House correspondents from Tass who have known the President fairly well personally felt, I'm sure, as we did. I think they thought it was a great loss.

MICHAELIS: Well, I guess what I was driving at was the whole ideological maybe, even on the right-wing press who would have been very critical of President Kennedy—did this extend, in other words, to both extremes, about the assassination?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, as far as the personal relationships went, yes, it did. You didn't differentiate at all between people you were working with. I think probably, too, the only thing that kept a lot of people on the White House staff, people who were so close to the President who were thrown into the very midst of all these plans and preparations—and I think that it was the only thing which kept them going for several days. They didn't have time to think about their

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personal loss or what it was even going to mean to them in terms of their career or their future. I think that no one gave it really even a passing thought at that. They were so intensely involved immediately in making all kinds of decisions concerning the next few days. I think this is probably true in the death of anyone in a family—that all the decisions that have to be made about a funeral are the only things which keep you going for a day or two until the numbness wears off. But—

MICHAELIS: Was there any speculation in the beginning about the cause or did everyone accept the Oswald [Lee Harvey Oswald]—?

GAMAREKIAN: I don't think there was much chance at that point to really speculate, other than to accept the facts which were apparent. I think that people were pretty much writing straight news stories at this point and thinking in terms of events that were happening, rather than trying to analyze

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too much what had—

MICHAELIS: Let me put the question this way. On the afternoon that it happened, was there any sense that this was a coup d'état, that this might have other aspects where the White House itself might be involved?

GAMAREKIAN: I didn't talk to anyone who expressed this feeling. And I didn't hear anyone talk in these terms. I gathered that it did enter the minds of the President and some of the other people out in Dallas which was one reason they felt they should get him out of there immediately.

My reaction was, "It must be some sort of a nut." You get enough nutty letters working in the White House to know that there are a lot of them around.

MICHAELIS: But no one said, "Let's put on additional security guards" or that sort of thing?

GAMAREKIAN: They did have—this is one thing that they did automatically. I know that they doubled security around the White House,

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But this was something that I don't think I was aware of at the time. We didn't discuss it. I think it was just one of the automatic things that they did.

MICHAELIS: Were any of the press following the line of inquiry of that nature?

GAMAREKIAN: Well, some of the press remained out in Dallas. I think that they did. The ones that came back to Washington were not in a position where they were able to do this very easily, except through their Washington sources.

The people in Dallas were, I think, the ones that pursued this line of thought a bit more. The press corps, a good many of them, had been personal friends, had spent so much time with him and seen him so much in different situations that they felt very close to him personally. And I know, watching some of these events on television in the lobby, you would see newspaper men sitting there with tears running down their cheeks.

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I think it was an experience with which we all felt caught up. There wasn't any differentiation between newsmen and staff in terms of the fact that you had lost someone. I think it was the feeling that we had all lost someone and that we all shared in trying to put it together again.

MICHAELIS: Do you want to stop with that?

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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