

Helen Lempart Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 03/1966
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Helen Lempart was a secretary to John F. Kennedy from 1955 to 1963. This interview focuses on JFK's office during his time as senator, the 1960 Democratic presidential election, and Lempart's time working for the Kennedy administration, among other topics.

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Revision of the Gift of Personal Statement
of Helen Lempart
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Helen Lempart
Sept. 25, 1972
Date

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Helen Lempart– JFK #1

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Oral History Interview

with

HELEN LEMPART

March, 1966
New York City

By Nelson Aldrich

For the John F. Kennedy Library

ALDRICH: Where do you come from?

LEMPART: I come from Massachusetts.

ALDRICH: Whereabouts?

LEMPART: From a town called Chicopee.

ALDRICH: That's near Worcester, no, Springfield. Right?

LEMPART: Yes, right next to Springfield.

ALDRICH: Did you go to school there?

LEMPART: I did. I went to high school there and to business school in that area.

ALDRICH: And you trained as a secretary.

LEMPART: That's right.

ALDRICH: How fast were you typing at this point?

LEMPART: I really don't recall.

ALDRICH: But stenography and the whole bit.

LEMPART: Well, I would say that I was fairly efficient at both typing and stenography.

ALDRICH: Well, I'm sure of that. And how did you first get involved with

the Kennedy entourage?

LEMPART: Well, it was in 1955, the end of 1955, that I was offered the job on the Senator's staff. I was still in Massachusetts at the time, but it was to work on his Washington staff.

ALDRICH: And who offered you the job?

LEMPART: Well, it was sort of a round robin thing. One of the girls in the office, in the Washington office, was leaving the staff, and she was from the Boston area. Of course, most of the people in the office who were from Massachusetts were from the Boston area, and it was politically good to have someone from the other side of the state in the office. A judge friend of the Senator's at the time . . .

ALDRICH: Who's that?

LEMPART: Judge [Daniel] Keyes from Springfield, who was not really a friend of mine, but who I knew slightly (but served in the Chicopee court also), had called me and asked if I was interested and would I come over to see him, and he interviewed me. That was it.

ALDRICH: Had you formed any impressions of the Senator in 1955?

LEMPART: Well, I hadn't really except that when he was a candidate for the Senate in 1952, I mean, I followed his campaign closely. I wasn't eligible to vote at the time, but he was sort of an attractive man and somebody very appealing in the State of Massachusetts. Of course, he was known to everyone in the state. I'm a Democrat by family ties. So, of course, this was also something I took into consideration.

ALDRICH: Was your family very politically. . . .

LEMPART: No, not at all.

ALDRICH: Are you Irish, as well as . . .

LEMPART: No, I'm not. My background is Polish. My father was born in Austria but of Polish parents and lived in Poland until he was about seventeen or eighteen, when he came to the States. My mother was born in Massachusetts, but her parents were also of Polish descent.

ALDRICH: So Judge Keyes recommended you . . .

LEMPART: Yes.

ALDRICH: . . . for this job, and you took it.

LEMPART: That's right.

ALDRICH: Why did you take it?

LEMPART: Well, I had never been close to politics before, and I thought this would be a great opportunity. I didn't really feel that I wanted to spend the rest of my life in Massachusetts, and I wanted to do a little bit of traveling or live someplace else for a change. I hadn't intended it to be a permanent thing, but it turned out to be fairly permanent.

ALDRICH: What was the nature of the job that was offered you?

LEMPART: Well, I worked on case work which meant that any constituent mail that came in about immigration problems or visa cases, passport problems, anything of this nature, was something that I handled at the time: composing letters for the Senator's signature from constituents about these things; contacting the various government agencies who were involved in these problems, and sort of establishing a liaison with them to help me work out these problems and help our constituents.

ALDRICH: I see. And were you given a great deal of freedom? What was the exact process by which you would receive a letter and then write an answer to it, and how would this check in with the Senator's activities?

LEMPART: Well, of course, the Senator was a terribly busy man and couldn't answer every piece of mail that ever came into his office. So the responsibility was given to secretaries and, of course, his assistants. The mail was so voluminous that it was impossible for his assistants to handle everything also, so then the responsibility was passed down to the secretaries who worked on what they call case work. A letter would come in from a constituent saying that he had a cousin, or a mother, or a sister, somebody of that type, in Italy or Spain or Greece, wherever it was, and that they were having difficulty in bringing this person to the United States. In most of the cases there wasn't much you could do because of the immigration laws being so stringent, but in a lot of cases people were being held back because of technical things, and you sort of found loopholes in the immigration laws to help them come in. Many times it was worked out through private legislation also. So it would eventually involve that.

I was given a great deal of freedom and responsibility. I handled it all on my own, except when the problems were terribly complex. [Timothy J., Jr.] Ted Reardon, who was the Senator's administrative assistant at the time, would sort of get himself involved in the thing and make the contacts and, if necessary, bring it to the Senator's personal attention and have him do the contacting, et cetera. As far as private legislation was concerned, that was always the Senator's decision. We would do the research on it and see what the possibilities were of getting it through the Congress, through the committees. Then eventually the Senator himself would decide whether he would or would not introduce such a bill.

ALDRICH: How old were you at the time?

LEMPART: Twenty-three.

ALDRICH: Who was in the office in 1955? When you first came there.

LEMPART: Well, Ted Reardon was the administrative assistant at the time; Theodore C. Ted Sorensen was the legislative assistant; Lee White was also a legislative assistant, somewhat Ted Sorensen's assistant; Evelyn Lincoln was the Senator's private secretary; Pat Mulrennan from Boston was the receptionist in the office and also acted as Ted Reardon's private secretary, took his dictation, did his letters, things of that nature. Do you want me to go through the whole staff?

ALDRICH: Yes, sure.

LEMPART: Gloria Sitrin was Ted Sorensen's. . . . Well, I guess at the time her name was Liftman, really. She was also from Boston from the Chelsea area. She was Ted Sorensen's private secretary. And then a girl by the name of Mary Durkin was one of the legislative secretaries, as they called them, and she sort of worked for Lee White. Another girl in the office who was working on legislative mail at the time was named Maeve Kipp. She was from Norfolk, Virginia, I believe. And then working on the so-called case work were Dorothy McCann and a girl by the name of Eleanor Elhajj. And then a girl from Arlington, Virginia, by the name of Edwena Brown was the girl who did the general office work, took care of the files and opened the mail and sorted the mail and saw that it all got out in the evening after it was signed and completed.

ALDRICH: Perhaps we ought to take these people one by one. First of all, let me ask you what were your working conditions? What was the layout of the office?

LEMPART: Oh, it was pretty awful at the time. At that time the Senator was only assigned three small offices in his suite. Of course, one was used by him. The second office was sort of split up into two small cubby holes. One was occupied by Ted Reardon; the other one by Ted Sorensen and Lee White, who sort of sat back to back. Then Evelyn and Pat and Mary Durkin and Gloria and Maeve all sat in another small office where all of our constituents and visitors for the Senator or the other assistants came through. We had a very small office in what we called the "rat cellar." It was in the basement of the Senate Office Building at the time, very unattractive area, and four of us worked down there. This was the physical layout of the whole thing. It was pretty inconvenient.

ALDRICH: And when you had a question to one of your bosses, how did you get them?

LEMPART: Well, we had an intercom system with the phones so that rather than having to dial a specific number, we just picked up the phone, and I think we dialed one number, sort of extension system on the intercom.

ALDRICH: Mrs. Lincoln's book gives one the impression that the atmosphere here in those days was totally chaotic, not chaotic in a necessarily derogatory sense, but just very easy going, and really, one was never quite sure whether the letters would get out on time, but they always managed to. Would you comment on that?

LEMPART: I don't think that that's completely right at all. I mean it may have been utter chaos as far as visitors coming in and everything being in such a hubbub because of the lack of space, but one thing that the Senator always insisted on--and this was true in all the years that I ever worked for him--was that the mail was to be given immediate attention and done immediately. And every so often he himself would check this out and ask that we report to him. Each person in the office had to make up a little folder indicating how many pieces of mail came in that particular day; and how many of these pieces of mail had been answered; what the backlog was; how this was done. At least this was true in the legislative and case mail sections. Now, how this applied to Mrs. Lincoln. . . . I mean I don't know whether she was completely free from all of this sort of watching over bit, but this was something he always insisted on. I must say that I thought that we had a very smooth running office at the time, despite the constant tracking of people in and out and the great volume of mail we always got. It was always handled expediently, I thought.

ALDRICH: Have you read Mrs. Lincoln's book?

LEMPART: I haven't. No, I haven't. I've read parts of it, just leafed through it, but . . .

ALDRICH: I should have assigned it to you. She gives a picture of the Senator which is at once maternal and frustrated. In other words, she clearly felt very affectionate in a maternal way toward him and at the same time was exasperated by his sudden shifts of wishes or orders or whatever.

LEMPART: Well, I really couldn't explain that at all because I think I'd have to be Evelyn Lincoln to feel the same way about it. I mean my relationship with him at the time was, of course, not as close as hers. She saw him all the time; she worked with him constantly. As I say, I was in the basement at the Senate Office Building and somewhat divorced from all of this. But when the situation changed and our office was once again one consolidated group, I didn't find this about him at all. But, you know, it's different people's reactions to the same people.

ALDRICH: Well, that's negative against Evelyn . . .

LEMPART: But I can't analyze how Evelyn came to this conclusion at all. You know, her instincts were very maternal as far as everyone was concerned, not only about the Senator. I think that she tried to take on too much responsibility, and at times she just couldn't

handle it. And this is, perhaps, why she found it so frustrating.

ALDRICH: Can you give an example?

LEMPART: Well, I think in her handling of her own mail. Naturally, the mail being as heavy as it was, a lot of it had to be given his personal attention. Of course, this had to go through Evelyn, and she just didn't pay that much attention to these things. She was worried about whether his clothes had come back from the dry cleaners or whether the barber shop would be open at the time he wanted his appointment. And finally, at the end of the week she'd find that there was much too much mail on her desk, but rather than sort of relegating the responsibility of handling all of this and letting other people help her, she felt very protective about all of this and wanted to do it herself. So I can see very well why she felt she was overburdened, and why she found her job terribly frustrating at times or his demands too many.

ALDRICH: I work for an organization where we have never decided who shall see to it that such and such a piece of incoming mail goes to such and such a person. Whose job was that?

LEMPART: Well, I think it was sort of the general setup of the office. When the office had come into being in 1953 and the staff was hired, everybody was given a certain responsibility, and they were to handle this type of mail or that type of mail.

ALDRICH: But who saw to it that they got that type of mail?

LEMPART: Well, as I say, the girl who was sort of the general office clerk. She was the one to sort the mail; she was the one who sort of passed it on to everyone else.

ALDRICH: What was her name again?

LEMPART: Edwena Brown. But, I mean, of course, Mr. Sorensen and Mr. Reardon always sort of kept abreast of what was going on, what type of mail was coming in, and the fact that it was taken care of. I would say perhaps the legislative mail, which was completely different from what I was handling, was all read by Mr. White or Mr. Sorensen. They perhaps answered it personally or instructed the girls on how to best answer it. But, you know, of course, so many things are so terribly routine that any secretary can pick up a piece of mail, and if somebody is protesting some bill that's been introduced in the Senate on the St. Lawrence Seaway or something of this sort, you know that you had an automatic answer to this because you knew what the Senator's stand was on that. So you just automatically took care of it yourself.

ALDRICH: You must have gotten a lot of flak on the St. Lawrence Seaway at that time.

LEMPART: Oh, very definitely. Of course, everybody in Massachusetts wrote their congressman or their senator at that time, terribly concerned about it.

ALDRICH: The assistants did listen to this mail?

LEMPART: Oh, yes. And any time any one of us had any problem on mail, we would sort of take it up with one of them, and they were most helpful. They always took a great interest in what was going on so that we weren't completely free to do whatever we pleased. We did have to report to them and let them know exactly what was going on.

ALDRICH: Now we're talking about the period 1955 to . . .

LEMPART: 1956. From January 1956 to, let's see, 1958.

ALDRICH: And during that time you were still in the "rat cellar" and your duties remained the same? Since I'm totally ignorant of what it was like in the "rat cellar," I'll have to depend on you to tell me some stories, if you have any, about that period before we go on to something else.

LEMPART: Well, I don't remember anything in particular. It was just a very smooth running operation without any problems, and I don't recall that anything was that terribly important that happened. I mean there are some very funny little stories about immigration cases or military service cases. But that could go into days and days of discussion.

ALDRICH: Well, tell me one or two. . . .

LEMPART: Do you mean humorous or little interesting stories involving the Senator, or just . . .

ALDRICH: Sure, involving the Senator or his office staff, whatever. There must have been a Greek short order cook who wanted to get . . .

LEMPART: Oh, I have a marvelous story there. We had this little man--this man had written to the office several times and said that he was being deported from the United States and would Senator Kennedy help him in his particular case because he had a wife who was an American citizen. He had children who were also American citizens, and he just couldn't face going back to Italy at the time. Well, the letter itself was innocent enough, and he said that he had perhaps made a few mistakes as any average American boy would have, et cetera. So I routinely sent it over to the Justice Department, to the Immigration and Naturalization Service for a report to see exactly what the status of the case was and why he was being deported. Well, it turned out that this man was in prison in New Hampshire at the time and had a record of arrests that was just fantastic. There were about four pages of arrests made by civil authorities, or FBI authorities, one was impersonating an English officer in Great Britain,

another one was--I believe it was. . . . There were three or four assault and robbery charges, carrying illegal weapons. It was just preposterous. And there were charges pending against him at the time. He was in prison in New Hampshire, but also the authorities in Connecticut and Rhode Island and Massachusetts, I believe, had charges pending against him, and when he was released from prison in New Hampshire, he would have to face these authorities then. Well, I called the people who were the deportation experts at the immigration department and asked them what could be done about this--I mean, not that we really wanted to help the man, but it was all sort of amusing, and we were very interested to see how this could all turn out. The man (the deportation unit) there said that the only thing that he could think of doing was to write to the warden at the prison up in New Hampshire, of course, write a letter from the Senator asking whether the charges could be dropped there. And the immigration authorities, if the Connecticut and Massachusetts and Rhode Island authorities agreed, would drop the charges also, they'd just ship him off back to Italy again. So I discussed the case with Ted Reardon and he said, "Sure, why not? Let's just give it a whirl. What difference does it make?" So, we did compose a letter for the Senator's signature to this warden of this prison in New Hampshire, and the Senator got a big chuckle out of this, but he signed it and sent it out. Well, it turned out that the warden of this prison was a great Democrat and a real Kennedy fan. He said, "Anything for you, Senator. We'll release this man immediately and, as a matter of fact, I've contacted Connecticut and Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and they're willing to drop charges also in lieu of deportation. So the man was immediately deported, and he was happy, and we were happy, and everybody was happy. But he got back to Italy, and he wrote to us from I believe it was somewhere in Sicily and said that he was interested in getting a job with the American Consulate in Naples and would the Senator please write a letter of recommendation in his behalf to the American Consul General in Naples? Of course, we didn't do this. But that was one of my funniest experiences because this man who never did anything wrong and made the same mistakes any American boy would, he thought that was the average American boy.

ALDRICH: What were the guidelines in answering letters of this nature? Were they like, do what you can in every case?

LEMPART: That's right. Do what you can to help your constituent in every case. And many times the cases really didn't seem to be that soluble. But on the other hand, you felt that the immigration laws were so stringent, and this was one thing the Senator had always been interested in the many years he was in the Senate, that we just did the best we could, in many cases helped a lot of people, I thought. And he himself took such a personal interest in all of this. Many times he'd be up in Massachusetts, and somebody would approach him on a problem, and he'd suggest that they call the office and talk to me about it and see what could be done. I thought he'd just forget about it in two or so weeks. It was just a constituent favor and this was it. But he always sort of checked back on all these things, would ask me how the case was progressing or if we were able to do anything; if we were not able to help, what more he might do, or

if there was anyone else who might be able to help in some way. He always took such a personal interest in everything that did go on.

ALDRICH: Phenomenal memory!

LEMPART: Well, it was. It was just fantastic. I recall this one case: Some woman had met him on a plane coming back from Europe or something, and her husband. . . . She had married I think it was an Italian man, and the man had tuberculosis. At the time our immigration laws stipulated that if a person had tuberculosis, he couldn't come, you know, it was just too bad. But on the other hand, there was a loophole in the law that if this person was a tubercular patient, he could come to the United States and be hospitalized for a period of six months and be cured of this, then it was perfectly all right. So the Senator came back, and he had all of these notes written on a picture postcard--the woman's name, the man's name, what the situation was--and he asked me if I would follow through on it, which I did and found out that this man could come to the United States. Immediately hospitalized, of course, as soon as he got off the plane or boat, but it meant a matter of six or seven months in a sanatorium till he was cured and ready to rejoin his wife. So he'd (the Senator) come down to the office and ask what was happening. If he were passing by our "rat hole" in the basement on his way over to the Senate floor, he'd stop in the office and always ask how we were getting along with this particular case and were we able to work it out. And, fortunately, we were. He was very pleased, and of course, the woman was absolutely delighted.

ALDRICH: What was his entrance like into the "rat cellar?"

LEMPART: Oh, well, it was very funny because, as I say, he'd stop by there only when he was on his way to or from the Senate floor, and it was always sort of an accident. He'd suddenly recall that he did have an office down on that lower level, and he'd backtrack and come in to find out how everyone was doing and whether there were any great problems that needed his attention and just gave everyone the general pep talk about their doing a terrific job. And this was it. These little visits weren't very frequent, you know, maybe once a month, every couple of weeks, how often he seemed to think of it.

ALDRICH: Let's get on to 1958. What then happened to you, Helen?

LEMPART: What then happened to me? Well, as you know, there was his campaign in Massachusetts for his reelection to the Senate, and I went up to Boston to help in that particular campaign. I mean, I don't think anybody's help was needed. He was certainly a shoo-in, but his purpose of sort of getting some of the staff members of his up there to keep on top of all of this was the fact that he wanted a big vote. And he succeeded. It was a relatively boring campaign, there wasn't anything really exciting that went on there. The Republican candidate was sort of a sacrificial lamb, and it was a sure thing that the Senator would win again.

ALDRICH: The objective was to win by more votes than had ever been done.

LEMPART: By more votes, and he campaigned just as he would have had he been a newcomer on the political scene. He visited something like 163 cities and towns in Massachusetts that year and really had a terribly overbearing schedule all through the campaign.

ALDRICH: How early did you realize that this all-out effort was aimed at 1960?

LEMPART: Well, I think in 1956, you know, after the Democratic National Convention when he came so close to being the vice presidential nominee, I think everyone realized then and there that this man was going to become the President of the United States someday. I think that everybody thought that way before that, but it seemed to be something that, you know, would be much further away than 1960. I think everybody thought in terms of 1964 or 1968 or something like that. They didn't expect this sudden blossoming of the man, but you know, after what happened at the Convention in 1956, there was no way to go then but up and further up, and it was the perfect opportunity what with all of the national publicity that he got at that particular time.

ALDRICH: Now when you say everybody thought, who are you talking about?

LEMPART: Oh no, I guess I'm just speaking of our staff and perhaps the people who worked in the Senate, people that we knew who worked in the Senate, the Democratic members of the Senate, I would say, excluding the Southerners, of course.

ALDRICH: Now that's a whole other question. What is it like really to work in a Senator's office in this sense? Are you always in continuous caucus, unanimous in favor of your candidate?

LEMPART: Oh, very definitely, I think so. Well, you know, particularly with this man because he--well, there was just something about him, a certain magic. I don't know how one explains all of that.

ALDRICH: So you were all for him all the time?

LEMPART: Definitely, definitely. Even if he took stands that were rather unpopular and we first disagreed with, once we rationalized and realized why he felt this way about something in particular, then I think we all agreed with his way of thinking.

ALDRICH: How about the other girls in other offices whom you met?

LEMPART: You mean who worked for other Senators? I don't think this is absolutely true of them. I think there were a great many supporters of Senator Kennedy in the Senate Office Building at the time.

It would be hard to say that everybody felt the same way about him.

ALDRICH: But in other words, you know, Washington has always been suggested to me as the fondest place to go for girls because there are so many more girls than there are men. Right? What I'm driving at is this, how much loyalty did you find in your social life in the Senate Office Building amongst the people who worked for senators? Were they all pushing their bosses for president?

LEMPART: No. They weren't all pushing their bosses for president because I don't think they felt that all of their bosses had that much potential. I mean, they were very happy with being senators, and these people on their staff were very happy with just being a senator's secretary. This is prestige enough, I think, in these United States. You know, only one man among how many millions become President of the United States. And I think they realized this. Although it is exciting and I think it excited them a great deal to know that somebody in their midst, such as Senator Kennedy, would someday be. And, you know, I think a lot of them felt that he would be. Whether they liked it or not.

ALDRICH: Whether they liked it or not? .

LEMPART: Yes, I think a lot of people--I think a lot of the Southerners thought he was much too liberal for their blood and, of course, well, it seems that each person has a great deal of loyalty to their own boss, and if you're going to be loyal to a person, I think that you also agree with the way they feel on certain issues. Of course, the ninety-nine other--how many were there at the time? The ninety-five other senators at the time didn't have the same attitude that Kennedy did about certain issues.

ALDRICH: Right. You know one of the things that I've always admired from what I know of the President is that he encouraged dissidence; he encouraged argument. In other words, he did not encourage the kind of lapdog loyalty that our current President does in his staff.

LEMPART: You're absolutely right, he did not. No. And he was always very anxious no matter how unimportant your views may be to have them. I mean, he would occasionally go around the office and ask each girl--and, I mean, what difference did it make what a secretary thought of a particular bill or issue that was up before the Congress? But he would always ask everybody's opinion. You sometimes thought he was half joking in asking what you thought of this, but nevertheless, you sort of felt rather proud of the fact that he was interested in what your opinion might be. He often had himself a little chuckle when somebody said they disagreed completely. Of course, he was always one to give his side of the argument, and then we'd change ours also in favor of his.

ALDRICH: Sure, sure you would. But there was never any--I'm putting words

in your mouth which is a very bad interviewing tactic--but you never had the feeling that you had to edit your opinions before . . .

LEMPART: No, not at all. And, you know, he never minded an "I told you so" if you were the one to say that, or you sort of got a big kick out of his saying, "I told you so" if you were wrong. It was kind of an interesting relationship with the boss because not many people like to be told that they're right or wrong, or can maintain a sense of humor.

ALDRICH: Well, now, Helen, we've gotten off the subject. We're in 1958, and you're in Boston.

LEMPART: Uh-huh, during a completely boring campaign with not very many interesting sides to it.

ALDRICH: What were you doing then?

LEMPART: Well, I was helping both Ted Reardon and [Robert L.] Bob Thompson at the time. Bob had been a reporter for INS, International News Service, which had folded, and he had been assigned to the labor racketeering committee during its day as an INS reporter and I guess knew [Robert F.] Bob Kennedy relatively well. When the INS folded and the campaign was coming up, the Senator did not have a press secretary at the time. It wasn't necessary really to have one in the Senate office. So Bob was asked to handle the press matters during the Massachusetts campaign. So I worked with both Ted (Reardon) and Bob Thompson, helped Bob with press releases and anything that had to do with television appearances, press appearances, press conferences, et cetera. Ted was just sort of a general troubleshooter there. He didn't have any specific duty, he just helped wherever he was able to.

ALDRICH: Whatever happened to Bob Thompson?

LEMPART: Well, Bob is now. . . . Let's see, after the campaign, I think Bob stayed on the Senate staff for a short while, and then he (Bob Thompson) left to go to the New York Daily News. And then I think he left the News, and he's now with the Los Angeles Times. I'm not absolutely certain, but he does cover, or did cover, the White House for the News I believe it was, at the time of President Kennedy's Administration.

ALDRICH: Did you travel around the states a lot, I mean the state?

LEMPART: No, I didn't at all. I stayed in Boston most of the time. There wasn't really a great entourage of people who went along with the candidate in Massachusetts. [Kenneth P.] Ken O'Donnell and [Lawrence F.] Larry O'Brien handled his schedule during the campaign, and they were about the only two who were at the headquarters in Boston ~~who~~ ever traveled with him. And then they had a ward chairman, not a ward

chairman but a county chairman or a city chairman in every city, so that it was just a matter of meeting with local people and having them do most of the footwork rather than the people back in the headquarters in Boston.

ALDRICH: What were your connections with the local press, electronic or typographic?

LEMPART: Not very much. As I say, it was a boring campaign, the press wasn't that terribly interested because they knew what the outcome would be. They asked for the daily press releases--what the Senator was going to say in each city as he went along on his daily schedule, but there wasn't very much excitement, as I say, or nothing that was really stimulating to the press during that campaign. I don't remember any specific issues. I mean there may have been local issues of interest but. . . .

ALDRICH: No there weren't, there weren't any particular issues at all, but did you get any orders from on high about specific reporters or particular papers? Or, can you remember favoring one reporter against another or seeing someone do so?

LEMPART: No, that wasn't done at all, except I do remember that whether all the Boston newspapers were going to endorse our candidate or not was one of the big questions. I believe that he personally went to see each editor, or each publisher, of the various Boston newspapers, and I believe that they all did endorse him in the end. I think they did, That's right, even the Herald-Traveler.

ALDRICH: Even the Herald? Even [Robert B.] Choate?

LEMPART: That's right. I believe that the Senator did see Mr. Choate during that particular campaign and that Mr. Choate did endorse him. I mean I can't even. . . . Celeste, I think, was the name of our opponent during that particular campaign, Vincent Celeste. He was sort of unknown in the State of Massachusetts; he was of Italian extraction, a lawyer. And nobody seemed to know very much about him; nobody was that interested in him at all.

ALDRICH: Having rung up a 70,000 or more plurality on this election . . .

LEMPART: It was more than that.

ALDRICH: 700,000. That's it, 700,000. What then happened to you?

LEMPART: What then happened to me? Then I went back to the Senate Office Building in Washington, D.C., and I left my case work job and went to work with Ted Sorensen who was the speech writer and did all of the research for the Senator's speeches. Of course, it was obvious that his work was being accelerated because of the fact that the Senator had now become a somewhat national figure and was looking toward 1960 and would

be accepting engagements in other states than Massachusetts and doing a great deal of traveling. So Mr. Sorensen's work, speech-wise, was doubled, and he needed additional help. He only had one secretary at the time, so I went to work for him.

ALDRICH: What were your duties there?

LEMPART: Well, just sort of taking dictation and typing speech copies. He would, of course, dictate speeches or drafts of speeches. And it was a redraft and a redraft, and then the Senator would see them, and then a few other revisions were made before a final copy was done. But this involved an awful lot of time at that particular time because, as I say, the Senator started accepting engagements all over the country and was making a great many speeches through different parts of the United States at the time.

ALDRICH: How many hours were you putting in?

LEMPART: Well, about twelve or fourteen hours a day. It was a very busy time for all of us. I mean, everyone in the office was working harder at the time, but in my particular job, of course, the speeches were all important, and they had to be done by a particular time so it did mean that the three or four of us in that particular operation were there many times till midnight, till 11 or 12 o'clock at night most of the time.

ALDRICH: Perhaps we can get back to that in another way, but what happened in 1959 as the tempo picked up--to you?

LEMPART: Nothing happened in 1959. I continued working on the speeches and doing this type of work the entire year.

ALDRICH: Always in Washington?

LEMPART: Always in Washington.

ALDRICH: You didn't go out with the . . .

LEMPART: No. Very few people ever traveled with the Senator at that time. Sorensen very rarely went along on trips with him. I don't recall that any members of the staff really traveled with him at that time.

ALDRICH: Mrs. Lincoln did to Kansas.

LEMPART: Oh well, maybe she did on one occasion, but she was in the office most of the time. I think Pierre ^{Emile} ~~E. G.~~ Salinger--when was Pierre taken on? That must have been toward the end of 1959, and then Pierre would travel with the Senator. And I think Dave Powers went on trips with him at the time.

ALDRICH: Did you know Dave Powers?

LEMPART: I didn't know Dave very well. I met him in '58 during the senatorial campaign in Massachusetts and then saw him very briefly in Washington maybe two or three times in 1959 between trips or something like that. I did get to know him very well, though, in 1960 and the White House days.

ALDRICH: Maybe we ought to follow in chronological order. Where would you go on from this story of helping Sorensen write his speeches?

LEMPART: I don't think I can elaborate much more on that. As I say, it was just a matter of doing the speeches and the Senator becoming more and more preoccupied with traveling in different parts of the country and with what was going to happen in 1960 and making political contacts. The political work had been handled in our Senate office building--although I hadn't been involved in it that much--up until May of 1959 when they opened a headquarters at the Senate Office Building. I think they called it the Citizens for Kennedy--or it wasn't called anything at the time, I guess. But this was where all the political work was being done, where all the grass roots and important people and the real pols were being catalogued. And this all evolved and went on, and the files grew larger and larger, and contacts became more frequent with these people till 1960. And then in February of 1960, I was still working for Sorensen, but then I was sent off to Wisconsin to participate in the Wisconsin primary campaign. And during that campaign, I stayed in Milwaukee, and I worked for the man who was the executive director of the campaign there.

ALDRICH: Who was that?

LEMPART: His name is Jerry Bruno, and he had been on Senator William Proxmire's staff and had been, I guess, a Kennedy fan for quite awhile. And I don't know whether he had been dissatisfied

of just what the situation was, but he was one of the contacts in Wisconsin, and he went back to Wisconsin in December of '59 or January of 1960 and started the work on the primary campaign.

ALDRICH: And you worked for him?

LEMPART: Yes.

ALDRICH: What was he like to work for?

LEMPART: Who, Jerry? Well, he's sort of a diamond in the rough. He's really a funny little fellow, and he belongs in a Damon Runyon book. But he was just so completely devoted to the President-- or the Senator at the time. And he was very much aware of Wisconsin politics. I believe that prior to joining Senator Proxmire's campaign, he had been a great union man. He had worked for some company in Wisconsin and had been involved in the union movement, and this was his first involvement in politics. So he seemed to know a lot of people in Wisconsin; he seemed to know who the right people were to approach on various matters. And, of course, the more intellectual politicians had already found the Senator's appeal and were sort of working hand in hand with everyone else.

ALDRICH: What were you doing for him, Helen?

LEMPART: Just sort of general secretarial work. Well, I believe, at the time, Ken O'Donnell was really handling the President's, or the Senator's, schedule, but Jerry was the one that Ken would consult on whether he should make this stop at some particular town and who the politicians were there that they had to make contact with. Then Jerry also was sort of a coordinator. He just did everything and anything that had to be done.

ALDRICH: And did you follow that campaign with anticipation of victory or defeat?

LEMPART: Oh, I did. No, no. It was very definitely. . . . Well, I think, if you are wrapped up in a candidate and you believe in him, you never think of defeat. I mean, the main purpose is victory and you do the best you can. The people in Milwaukee at least-- and my only exposure to Wisconsin was Milwaukee--were very enthusiastic and very pro-Kennedy, and it was kind of fun because occasionally when it was quiet at the headquarters and the Senator was making an appearance in the town, we'd go out and pass out leaflets and buttons. And this really gave you the feel of what people felt about him. And this is where the enthusiasm for the whole thing came in: the fact that people would stop and say, "Yes, he's my candidate." Or they'd stop and say, "I'm for Nixon, and I don't want any of your dirty buttons." I think it was pretty obvious through the whole thing that the Senator, you know, had the upper hand. Of course, Senator [Hubert H.] Humphrey at the time was his Democratic opponent, and of course, his people were claiming victory also.

ALDRICH: Did you run into any anti-Catholic bombardment there?

LEMPART: Well, of course, not in Milwaukee because I guess the population or the percentage of Catholics in Milwaukee is pretty high. Most of the people we had working for us in the headquarters were Marquette University students and members of the Sodality and Holy Name Society, so. . . . But I wouldn't say that there was any anti-Catholic feeling in Milwaukee. I do recall that people who were assigned to other areas. . . . They had sort of county chairmen, who were Kennedy men and not Wisconsin men, but men who had been involved in prior campaigns of the Senator's, assigned to each district in Wisconsin, and I do recall that in some cases these people did say that, you know, there was a terrible anti-Catholic feeling in the area that they were working in. And I think this was all analyzed in the newspapers after.

ALDRICH: Apart from Bruno, who else did you meet in this campaign?

LEMPART: Who else did I meet or work with or. . . . Well, Ivan Nestingen, who was at the time mayor of Madison, was a great Kennedy backer, and Pat Lucey, who was the State Chairman in Wisconsin at the time, was very active. There were many other people whose names I don't recall at all, but I would say that these two, Mayor Nestingen and Pat Lucey, were sort of the center figures in the whole campaign, but they had been Kennedy supporters for quite some time, and they were the people that they relied on, or our people relied on, most heavily.

ALDRICH: Right. And after Wisconsin you went back to Washington?

LEMPART: I went back to Washington for about a week and then went on to West Virginia because then we were going through the West Virginia primary. And that was the most interesting experience, I must say.

ALDRICH: Tell me about it.

LEMPART: Well, I got down to Charleston, West Virginia and found out that one of the other girls who was involved in the campaign who generally did the women's appearances and the teas--of course, everybody was working on social and political things at this point--had to go down to Logan, West Virginia, to make arrangements for a rally at which the Senator was going to appear. Well, Logan is almost indescribable. It's a town of about 6,000 people, and its main industry had been coal mining until the mechanization of the mines. I think there were only about two or three industries there right then, not very prosperous and most of the people were unemployed. This was a great experience for me, and it was a real enlightenment because for the first time in my life I realized that there is true poverty here in the United States and that some of these people were living in such misery. We spent about two weeks down in Logan contacting all of the people who were going to help us make arrangements for the rally and do the printing of brochures and the handling of brochures

and opening a headquarters. It was really the strangest experience because after Wisconsin, where people were so enthused and so effusive in their praise about the Senator, you ran up against these people who really didn't know and didn't care about anything at all and found Mr. Humphrey the most appealing candidate because he seemed to be such an extreme liberal, and he was the one who was going to give them more unemployment compensation and all sorts of social welfare benefits. And they were rather suspicious about Mr. Kennedy at the time and exactly what his stands were, and the fact that he was a Catholic they didn't appreciate at all. So we met some very interesting people and had some very interesting arguments during that particular sojourn.

ALDRICH: Arguments with local people?

LEMPART: With local people. We couldn't find very many people to help us. We tried to establish a headquarters, and that didn't work because everyone wanted to be a chief and nobody wanted to be an Indian. And the people who wanted to be Indians weren't going to do it voluntarily. In other words, they wanted some sort of payment for their services, and we weren't in the position to do this. So we had to do most of the legwork ourselves, you know, running through the streets at 12 noon or 5 p.m. passing out brochures or handouts. And this is when we sort of met these people and found out what their views were on the candidate. And they weren't at all sold on him, and most of them seemed to be leaning to Humphrey and asked what John Kennedy could do for them. Then if you tried to explain what John Kennedy might be able to do for them eventually, then they wanted to know where his loyalties lie: whether it's first the Holy See and secondly the United States of America, or what, and that they didn't want the Pope in the White House, et cetera. You know, their arguments were so illogical, but these were sort of uneducated people, and this was the only way they saw the situation. But it was very strange because during the planning of this particular rally, the people there told us we couldn't attract any people at all to the county square to listen to the Senator speak unless we served refreshments or something of this sort, which we finally agreed to do.

The night of the speech there were, well, I would say there were about two thousand people--maybe I'm exaggerating slightly--but I know the square was completely mobbed with people, and we did serve refreshments, and people were terribly interested in this. It was sort of sad because these people, they'd come up to the table and say they hadn't eaten for weeks. You know, a hot dog or a bottle of soda pop was the greatest thing that anybody could do for them. But once the Senator started to speak, there was no activity near these picnic tables, and they all listened. And really, he was met with so much enthusiasm there that evening. They all applauded. They were all very excited. He did win Logan County, I remember, in the campaign. By what majority, I don't know; what the vote in Logan itself was, I don't know. But it was really strange that these people, you know, the minute they met him and saw him, should change their minds completely about him. And they did because. . . . Particularly one man--I had a terrible argument with him on the street. For about an hour and a half I was trying to explain what being a Catholic meant and how Senator Kennedy felt about

social welfare, et cetera, et cetera. And I met him on the street the day after the speech, and he was converted. I couldn't do anything to convert him when I spoke to him, but seeing the Senator once and hearing him speak, and he made a great deal of sense that particular day, made all the difference in the world to this man.

ALDRICH: And what kind of a man was he, do you remember?

LEMPART: I don't remember exactly what he did, but he was fairly prosperous. I wouldn't say that he was. . . . In this town you'd walk down the street at 12 o'clock noon and find all of these physically fit, able-bodied men just sort of wandering the streets because there was no employment and nothing else for them to do. And this particular man had some sort of small business, and he was fairly, I wouldn't say well off, but he was holding his own and not having any problem at all. But he was still terribly suspicious about this all, and he seemed to have a great deal of compassion for the other people in the town who had great problems, financial problems and everything else. And I must say this, this was one of the most depressed areas in the United States that I've ever seen.

ALDRICH: You know that many observers felt that this was a revelation for the Senator as well?

LEMPART: It was. I didn't have that much personal contact with him during that campaign because you don't really; he's constantly traveling. But I do remember, you know, the talk going around the headquarters on what his feelings were after having seen what misery these people lived in and exactly what was going on in their lives and what compassion he had for them all. He really did, and of course, just shortly after that, or during that particular campaign, was when [Chester R.] Huntley and [David] Brinkley did this White Paper Report on what was going on down there in West Virginia and how little had been done during the past Administration to help these people. It was true. I don't know whether the problems will ever be solved there. . . .

ALDRICH: So you were passing out handbills there in Logan County? You enjoyed that.

LEMPART: I did really because it really gave you the opportunity to meet the people, and if they had anything to say about the candidate, they were going to say it right then and there. But most of the people were terribly polite. This is strange because, as I said, in Wisconsin they were very enthusiastic, and yet they would take a piece of literature about the candidate and rumple it up and throw it in the nearest litter basket or just down on the ground. But nevertheless, the people in Wisconsin would say something or would show you some sort of enthusiasm for or against the candidate. And you got to West Virginia; these people were terribly polite; they would carefully fold these things and put them in their pockets--but no comments at all, absolutely none. And when I got back up to Charleston after the experience in Logan, a couple of times on Saturday

morning or sometimes very early in the morning, I'd go to the plant gates to pass out brochures again or when the people were coming out of work. And it was the same thing. These people would very silently take these brochures, carefully fold them, in their pockets, never look at you--I mean they'd look at you but never say one way or the other: We don't like him; we do like him; you know, you can take your candidate. But you didn't know what they were thinking, what they were feeling, absolutely nothing at all.

ALDRICH: Scotch-Irish, I suppose. Where did you go from West Virginia?

LEMPART: From West Virginia back to Washington again, and at this point, I think we were all starting to prepare for the Convention in 1960 in Los Angeles. As I recall, I got back to Washington, and everything was sort of disorganized. I mean people who had always been in Washington during the campaigns and hadn't been doing any traveling were still doing the same type of work and somewhat settled in their work, but all of us who had been involved in the campaigns came back. It was a nebbish sort of thing. We just didn't know what we were going to do next and what we would be assigned to doing. So then it was almost time to start preparing for the Convention. I got involved in the project of the delegate cards at that point. Of course, you know about these delegate cards, don't you?

ALDRICH: Yes, I do. That's a fascinating subject in itself, I must say. Who assigned you to that?

LEMPART: Well, Ted Reardon, who was the administrative assistant still, thought that the people at the Esso Building, where all of this work was being handled, desperately needed help, and rather than continuing hiring outside people, he thought it was best to make use of the personnel we had and particularly those who had been exposed to some of the other campaigns and knew who these people were and what it was all about. So I went down to the Esso Building and started working on the cards.

ALDRICH: What is a card?

LEMPART: Well, it was very interesting because this was sort of. . . . Dave Hackett was the one who was really in charge of this project, and I went to see him the first day and was handed this little blue card, or large blue card; it was about five by seven. He explained to me that we were going to make a list, or we were going to receive lists of all of the delegates to the National Convention and all of the alternate delegates, and we were going to do a great deal of research on each and every one of them. Apparently this had been done during the 1956 campaign for Mr. [Adlai E.] Stevenson, but I don't believe in such great detail as ours were done. And we had to make up the cards and find out as much as we could about these people but without letting them know that we were doing it, of course. And, in some cases, the state chairmen or county chairmen were a great deal of help, and they would submit biographical material on these people and let us know whether they were for Kennedy or against Kennedy; if

they were against Kennedy, who their first choice for president might be, who their second for presidential nominee at the Democratic Convention. And the card showed the person's name, whether they were a delegate or an alternate delegate, what their past political associations had been, what their backgrounds were, their work, their likes, their dislikes, their age.

ALDRICH: How detailed did that get?

LEMPART: Well, as detailed as we could possibly get. For research material we used books like the, well, let's see--the Congressional Directory wasn't much help, but Who's Who, in many cases a lot of these people were listed in Who's Who, and the books that various states publish about their officials or authorities. I don't know what they call the particular books, but every state issues or publishes some sort of a book about the state, county, city, et cetera, authorities and tries to give as much, or they give as much biographical material as you could possibly want. And then I believe also at that point--I'm not certain, but I do think that certain people had been assigned to sort of find out as much as they could about these people. They would report back to us to say well, you know, this man loves [Lyndon B.] Johnson but hates [Stuart] Symington and feels so and so about Kennedy so that we would record this on this particular card. Many times we'd have conflicting reports, and it was rather difficult to try to disseminate all of this information, but we did the best we could.

ALDRICH: You mean codify this information?

LEMPART: Yes. And then after we went to Los Angeles, we were still somewhat working on the cards. But then they had this great setup where each man in the Kennedy organization was assigned to a delegation from a particular state and--whether he was seeing them socially or businesswise or anything else--tried to find out as much information as they could about them. The most important thing was to find out if they were for Kennedy, and if they were not, who they were for, who their second choice was or who their third choice was. And it was amazing because once we were in Los Angeles and we had completed these cards and the various state committees started caucusing or having different sorts of meetings, our key men would report to us every day and about three days. . . . Well, I would say the day the Convention opened, which was on a Monday--and the balloting was on Wednesday or Thursday--we had a pretty good accounting of exactly where we stood. And each morning we would hold a caucus of our own, or hold a quorum of our own. We'd have a quorum call, and the day of the balloting for the presidential candidate, I think we were about seven or eight votes off of what the actual count was at the Convention. But then it was because Wyoming wasn't. . . . They had a split delegation, and when the roll call came to Wyoming, I believe that they were the state that put Kennedy over, and they went all for Kennedy rather than their original count.

ALDRICH: Helen, I have to ask you a rough question. Many people have accused the Kennedy brothers, in his drive for the nomination, of using tricky information, that is to say compromising information

that came to them somehow or other on certain delegates.

LEMPART: You mean blackmail?

ALDRICH: I do, yes.

LEMPART: Oh no, I don't think that was true at all.

ALDRICH: At least on the cards that you dealt with?

LEMPART: Oh no. That's right. I don't think there was any blackmail at all used.

ALDRICH: There wouldn't be anything. . . . You know, it would be perfectly normal.

LEMPART: Well, I mean, we didn't have such personal information that would be derogatory or that a person could possibly use for blackmail.

ALDRICH: When you talk about personal background, what do you mean? How detailed was that?

LEMPART: Well, perhaps if we could find out what a person's religious faith was; what their business affiliation was; how they felt in the 1956 Democratic National Convention about the vice presidential candidate; whether they had voted for Kennedy or for Estes Kefauver, and if they had not voted for Kennedy, why they had not--if somebody happened to know--what they felt about Stevenson in '52 and '56; what they felt about Kennedy in '60, if we could sort of get that information from people who knew them. But I don't think that--I always think of blackmail as trying to . . .

ALDRICH: Find out whether somebody had defrauded on their income tax or something like that.

LEMPART: Yes, or something of that sort. Oh no, we didn't have access to that type of information. I mean, I'm sure that the only agency of the government who could get it for you would be the FBI or the Secret Service, and certainly we didn't have that type of information at all. And even from personal contacts, I don't think that if somebody had something derogatory to say about somebody's character, I don't think that this was used because I think the Senator was above this. He really didn't care about what a person's personal life was and that he wasn't going to use this at all for his own gains. And I don't think he ever did.

ALDRICH: I'm sure the Senator was. I'm not sure that Bobby was.

LEMPART: Oh, I don't agree with you there at all. No, I think Bobby was too. And I don't think Bobby really did anything that the Senator wouldn't have agreed with during that campaign that whole year.

I think everything that Bobby did he consulted with the Senator first before he went ahead and did anything or made any major decisions on his own.

ALDRICH: Possibly. Did you go to California then?

LEMPART: Oh yes, I did.

ALDRICH: And where were you there?

LEMPART: Well, I was locked in the room that [Theodore H.] Teddy White mentions in his book. We had guards. Well, it was quite comical.

It was just very funny. There were five of us who were working on these so-called delegate cards, and I believe that we each had ten states-- or the lesser populated ones maybe someone would have more of. But we were each assigned a certain number of states to handle the delegate cards, and our key men would call in every evening or every afternoon after having had lunch or dinner or gone to a nightclub with their delegation to report back to us what their feelings were about the candidate, or our candidate. There wasn't much change though, as I recall, from what the people originally felt going into that Convention as to. . . . Because we completely discounted states like New Jersey which were pledged to support their own candidate, Governor [Robert B.] Meyner. And no matter how much pressure was used or however much he was asked, he wasn't going to release his delegates. So that we had a pretty good count before we went in, but this contact was really valuable because it was really surprising how many people fluctuated from one candidate to another, and many of them only because they were entertained in Lyndon Johnson's Southern Hospitality Room, or John Kennedy's party room, or something of this nature.

ALDRICH: Can you think of any specific examples of that?

LEMPART: I really can't at the moment.

ALDRICH: How many hours did you work during that time?

LEMPART: I must say that that was a pretty rough time because we'd generally go into the office--or our little cubby hole room--at about 9 o'clock in the morning . . .

ALDRICH: Where was your cubby hole room?

LEMPART: In the. . . . Was it the Ambassador Hotel? I can't remember the name of the hotel. No, I think it was the Biltmore. They have the room, the Punch Bowl Room or whatever they call that room down in the cocktail lounge. I think it was the Biltmore we were at. And we had one ordinary hotel room, the furniture had been moved out and five small desks moved in, and we were just working there with the cards. This was sort of the "secret" room. Nobody was supposed to go in or go out unless they were sort of passed over by the yeoman guard who was Dave Hackett at the time. We worked rather long hours. We sort of alternated. Each evening we'd

work till about 10 o'clock, and then some of us would stay in the office till about 2 o'clock in the morning. I guess two of us would stay on the 2 o'clock shift, and the others would get off at ten. We alternated in this as the days went on. This was for about two weeks, you know, once the delegates arrived, which was about a week before the Convention opened, till the end of the Convention.

ALDRICH: Pretty rough.

LEMPART: It was really!

ALDRICH: What were your satisfactions? Activity?

LEMPART: There weren't any at all. Except knowing you were working for a cause, and you were sure that your candidate was going to make it. And I don't really think that the Johnson or the Symington--or who else was it at the time?--that their people did work as hard or were as interested in what was going on. I don't really know from experience because I never did meet those people or see what they were doing or even hear about, to this day, what they were doing.

ALDRICH: You never did meet them?

LEMPART: No.

ALDRICH: You were working too hard.

LEMPART: Well, as I say, we were locked in this room for two or three weeks--three weeks in all because when we first got there, I think it was about two weeks before the Convention opened, and we were still working on the cards and setting up the files and doing everything else that had to be done.

ALDRICH: What did you do with the cards once they were assembled or codified?

LEMPART: What did we do with them? Well, there were constant changes. I mean, your key man called in every day. I mean, there weren't . . .

ALDRICH: What do you mean your key man?

LEMPART: Well, as I say, there was one man assigned to each delegation, each state, and he would call in and say, "Well, all of a sudden, our little delegate here has decided that he does not like Kennedy, and he's going to go for Johnson on the first ballot. However, on the second ballot if Johnson doesn't come close to it, he'll switch back to Kennedy again." So our job was to constantly record this.

ALDRICH: That's all, you'd never say, "According to our data here, that's. . .".

LEMPART: Well, occasionally they'd call in before a meeting with their

delegation and say, "What is the dope that you have these particular people? Do you know whether Joe Smith from Louisville, Kentucky, has said who he's originally for, and what was your source of information?" We always tried to record our source of information also. So then I don't know eventually how they worked this all out, by persuasion, I guess, friendly persuasion of some kind.

ALDRICH: Do you remember who you enjoyed working with most?

LEMPART: Who I enjoyed working with most?

ALDRICH: Yes, the other voice on the other end of the line.

LEMPART: No, I couldn't say really because it was all very businesslike, and people were all interested in doing the best they could for the candidate. So I don't really remember that anybody was exceptionally good at what he was doing or exceptionally bad. I think all of those people really did the best they could.

ALDRICH: Okay, well, that's a marvelous place to stop.

Second Oral History Interview

with

HELEN LEMPART

By Nelson Aldrich

For the John F. Kennedy Library

ALDRICH: Well, Helen, we were talking about the cards that were kept on all the delegates at the 1960 Convention. Where were you located?

LEMPART: Well, we had. . . . You mean our office?

ALDRICH: Yes?

LEMPART: There were five of us, and we had a one room suite at the Biltmore Hotel, I believe it was. I think we did go through that, didn't we?

ALDRICH: Who were the girls you were working with then?

LEMPART: Well, two of the girls. . . . I guess everyone had been on the staff at one time or another, either on the political staff or the Senate staff. One was Mary Durkin, who I mentioned as being on our staff; another girl was Pat Burke, who had been on the Esso Building staff, and Joan Sweeney. Who was the fifth? I don't recall the fifth one was. . . . Perhaps there were only four of us. I don't remember now.

ALDRICH: Where were you staying?

LEMPART: Oh, at a horrible little hotel called the San Carlo which was very near to the Biltmore. Because it was so convenient, we stayed there, but after all of our people started coming into Los Angeles to help at the Convention, we moved out to another hotel which was some distance further on one of the large boulevards, I don't recall the name of it. The Park Wilshire or something of that sort.

ALDRICH: Well, you probably didn't have a minute to think about your surroundings at all, did you?

LEMPART: No, there wasn't actually any time because we were constantly

under pressure and working these very long hours.

ALDRICH: Now who was the . . . Who did you deal with? Who would come and ask you questions?

LEMPART: Who was somewhat our supervisor or liaison with the higher-ups? Well, Dave Hackett was the one who was in charge of this particular project at the time, and he was the one who would call the quorums every morning and he would take our--go through the roll call of the various states.

ALDRICH: And you had your group of cards?

LEMPART: Yes, I believe that I had about eight or ten states to look after. I remember that I did have New York and Pennsylvania. I think the other girls perhaps handled more since there were fewer delegates from the other states.

ALDRICH: And just to refresh my memory, what kind of information? How they stood, wasn't that it?

LEMPART: Yes, how they stood, primarily. We had the name of the delegate, his address, the state he represented, who his first choice for the presidential nominee would be, who his second choice was should he feel that his first choice couldn't quite make it, et cetera. And also recorded on the cards were information as to the man's religion, his club associations, other political affiliations, as much data as we could possibly get--nothing terribly personal, but sort of public information on all of these people. And also what was rather interesting was that the political people from each state often kept in touch with the Senator's office and would mention in their letters to him that they had seen so-and-so at some political function back in the state, and they had discussed the 1960 Convention and what this man's particular feelings were about all of these people. And we kept recording all of these little notes from this correspondence onto these cards. And also, if the Senator had made a speech or attended some dinner or other type of function in a particular state and met these people, this was also recorded; whether he had personally met them, whether he referred to them on a first name basis, or as Mr. So-and-so. Any information at all that was available was recorded on these cards.

ALDRICH: Was it coded, the information?

LEMPART: Not on the delegate cards, it wasn't. Prior to the delegate cards being made up--this is another history of these cards-- I think it was back in 1957 or 1958 when everybody became aware, or everybody on the staff, at least, became aware of the fact that the Senator would be making his bid in 1960. The people in the office started a sort of political card file. This information was all coded--people who were supporters on a grass roots level, people who were politically important, people who were socially important--and all the information that was

recorded on these cards was sort of transferred to the delegate cards. But of course this was a much larger file than the delegate thing itself.

ALDRICH: In other words, what I'm driving at is that you didn't computerize this procedure? There wasn't time.

LEMPART: Oh no, there wasn't any particular system set up that way.

ALDRICH: This went on for how many days prior to the Convention?

LEMPART: Well, the card file was started right after the West Virginia primary was over with. This is when we started getting lists from the people in various states, their slate of delegates and which delegates were elected to represent them at the Convention, et cetera. So it involved several months, but it was right up until Convention time that we were still completing the work on these cards.

ALDRICH: That takes us up to the election, or the nomination. Did you get a chance to go into the hall of delegates?

LEMPART: I did. Of course, the day of the nomination all our work was completed. If we hadn't made it then, we never would have. So we were sort of on our own to do what we pleased. At first I went over to the area of the sports arena where they had individual cottages set up for all of the candidates, and two of the secretaries went along with the now Senator Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Kenneth O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien who were sort of going to--I don't know exactly what they were going to do. All of our people were out on the floor and had these walkie-talkies and were assigned to the delegations, and they would report any last minute changes back to the cottage. But it was very quiet at that point, and there wasn't much changing being done, so we found that it wasn't necessary to stay there although I believe the men did. We went over to the sports arena.

ALDRICH: What was the atmosphere in the little cottage? Was it tense?

LEMPART: Well, I think everybody. . . . No, it wasn't tense at all because of the fact these delegate cards were so valuable. That particular morning before going out to the sports arena, we took our regular roll call and found that the Senator would make it on the first ballot. Maybe there was a question of one or two votes, but he would make it on the first ballot. And then, of course, states like New Jersey who had their favorite son--and did Michigan? I don't recall whether Michigan was released or not. They were committed at one point to G. Mennen Williams, but I think they had been released from their obligation there, but there were still many people in the Michigan delegation who intended to continue supporting their favorite son candidate and had said that they would not switch until the second ballot. So, if he did not have enough votes on the first ballot at that point, he was very close to it. It was certainly a sure

thing had they gone to a second ballot, so that there wasn't this sort of tense fear that the candidate wouldn't come through. I think that everyone sort of felt, you know, that it was going to be a success.

ALDRICH: And who was in the little cottage again? These two girls and Senator Robert Kennedy. . . .

LEMPART: And Kenneth O'Donnell and Larry O'Brien. And then the key men, of course, were out on the floor at the sports arena and reporting back whether there were any changes.

ALDRICH: So where did you go after that?

LEMPART: You mean after having gone to the sports arena?

ALDRICH: No, you went to the cottage, then you went to the. . . .

LEMPART: We went to the arena. And at that point they were just starting balloting. Oh, at the time we entered the place, there was this demonstration for Stevenson. Each candidate was given fifteen minutes or something like that for his supporters to go into the arena and demonstrate, and I must say Stevenson's was a resounding success that day.

ALDRICH: Did that worry you at all?

LEMPART: Well, no, not really because he really lacked the support of the delegates at this point. It was just that you felt that, you know, the general public being so enthused about the candidate, it was something to think about. I just don't know. I think another funny incident was when we were going into the sports arena, there were several people demonstrating outside, and they were a rather odd looking bunch of creatures, I must say, carrying these signs and trying to convince the delegates as they entered the arena that Stevenson should be the candidate.

ALDRICH: How were they odd?

LEMPART: Well, they were very strange. You've been to Boston Common or Pershing Square and seen these rather strange creatures, these soap-box evangelists or the political soothsayers.

ALDRICH: Like Father Feeney.

LEMPART: Well, yes, probably some of them were that rabid.

ALDRICH: And where did you go? What accommodations were available to you?

LEMPART: Well, all the delegates were on the floor, and no guests were allowed on the floor except the working guests. We sat up in the balcony, fortunately. We sort of squeezed in with our little group of Kennedy people. We were right in the first row balcony directly

opposite the podium so that we had a perfect view of everything that was going on.

ALDRICH: Do you remember anything else that went on? What were your feelings?

LEMPART: No, I think everybody was rather excited and very nervous at that point. I do recall that we took in our sheet of paper with our delegate count, and it was almost perfect right up until the Wyoming vote. It was just such an exciting time. I mean, I don't think anybody can recall exactly what happened or if anything different or out of the way happened at that time. I think we were too excited about what was going on.

ALDRICH: Did you then go out and celebrate?

LEMPART: Oh yes. Well, of course, we waited till the Senator arrived at the sports arena and made his speech of acceptance. Then a whole group of us--all of us who had been working together--went out to some little place on Sunset Boulevard and drank much champagne and started discussing what would happen to us all after this.

ALDRICH: What did you expect would happen to you after this?

LEMPART: Well, we started to become very excited and think about the national campaign and what it was going to be like working for a presidential candidate, the excitement of that November to come.

ALDRICH: What did you look forward to, if anything?

LEMPART: Well, I think we just looked forward to November 6th--I believe it was that year--and the Senator's victory. We were all pretty confident that he would, once he had reached this plateau, achieve what he was seeking.

ALDRICH: But how did you see yourself in the campaign? Doing what sort of work?

LEMPART: I didn't at all. I didn't know what I would be doing. Of course, even if it was licking envelopes or typing envelopes or addresses on envelopes, it was going to be a great thrill.

ALDRICH: You were really a fan as well as a . . .

LEMPART: Oh, I was. Very much so.

ALDRICH: What did happen then? What did you do during the campaign?

LEMPART: We all went back to Washington and didn't quite know what was going to happen there, and everything was sort of in a state of

disorganization. The Senator had gone back to Hyannis and was conferring with all of his staff assistants there. We were just sort of sitting back and waiting to see what was going to happen next. I believe I did go back to the Senate Office Building, but then I was informed that I was going off the payroll at the Senate Office Building and going to the Democratic National Committee and that I would be situated there working for Ken O'Donnell, who was going to be responsible for the President's schedule during the campaign.

ALDRICH: Now that must have been a very intriguing job?

LEMPART: Well, it was rather interesting because there were so many facets to this. This is where a lot of discord came in among a lot of the people who had been avid supporters in the past, and despite the fact that they lived out in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, or Pocatello, Idaho, where the Senator finally did make an appearance, they felt that it was most urgent that he come into their area. Of course, a man can only do so much in a campaign of that type on a national level.

ALDRICH: But I'm fascinated with how O'Donnell managed to handle this.

LEMPART: Well, I think it was more a decision of. . . . I think Ken sort of made decisions as to where the Senator would make speeches of that sort. I think I missed out on this particular part. I think after the Convention when everybody congregated at the Cape, they went off from there to travel through the various states to consult with the political leaders there on how this would best be worked out. I believe, also, that right after the nomination at the Convention, they met and discussed how the Senator was going to spread himself during that campaign, so this was more or less pretty well settled by the time I reported to the Committee to help work on the schedule. And they had decided that the large industrial states were the places where the Senator should expose himself the most, where it would do the most good, and probably the smaller areas were chosen because of their geographical location or their general appeal to the public. I don't know why or how these decisions were made.

ALDRICH: What was O'Donnell like to work for?

LEMPART: He was a very easy person to work for. He seemed to have a definite way of doing things and was a very good judge of people and found little difficulty in making decisions, and generally they were the right ones.

ALDRICH: What do you mean when you say a very good judge of people? That would hardly seem to be a necessary . . .

LEMPART: Well, it was at that time if you understand the fact that you're dealing with all of these political people who were giving you a song and dance about how important it is to the Senator to do this or do that and who were sort of building up their own prestige or the

prestige of their area. I mean, he was involved with all types of people, and he had a very good discerning nature, I would say, in judging the phonies from the real people, and those who would produce and those who were just a lot of talk. That was about it.

ALDRICH: Right. Can you think of an example?

LEMPART: No, not right offhand I can't.

ALDRICH: How did he. . . . There must have been a set plan as to what the Senator did when he came to a town or city?

LEMPART: Oh well, the scheduling was a very involved thing. They had what they called "advance men," and these people were assigned to go to the different states to discuss with the people there what it would be best for the Senator to do, which affairs it would be best for him to attend, where he could get the largest crowd, what area was pro-Republican or pro-Nixon where no matter what he did he just couldn't win their votes or their support, so that this took a great deal of time and a lot of effort on everybody's part. These people (the advance men) went out and sort of would report back to Mr. O'Donnell to let him know exactly what the situation was there, and although the political leaders may have said that some dinner or some sort of rally was the best thing, they would have disagreed, and Ken would sort of base his decision on what the advance man had to say rather than, in some cases, what the local people had to say unless he had a great deal of faith in their judgment.

ALDRICH: What an extraordinary job he had there.

LEMPART: It was because, I mean, he really didn't make a great many friends, and it was easy to make enemies by saying no. Actually, I'm sure the final decision on what was to be done was the Senator's. I'm sure that he was consulted and made the final decision on most of these things. But it was still a rather responsible. . . .

ALDRICH: Did you work with charts? How did you plot. . . . Did you map this thing out?

LEMPART: Well, there were about eight or ten people who were on the Democratic National Committee staff just in the scheduling department, and I believe they had huge maps. . . . I traveled most of the time during the campaign, so once everything started, I wasn't aware of what was going on back at the Committee. But I believe that they had these huge maps and had pinpointed where a possibility of a stop would be or where he had decided to go, what area he was covering. And of course, all of this had to be coordinated with Vice President, or Vice President-elect, Johnson's people at that time so that there wouldn't be any conflict in schedules there. They had decided it would be better for Johnson to cover one particular area and Kennedy to cover the other. If you remember, the Senator made very few stops in the South. The South was sort of left to the vice

presidential candidate.

ALDRICH: Okay, now you were traveling all of this time. Who were you traveling with? What for?

LEMPART: Let's see. Well, there was a whole entourage traveling with the President. I went along primarily because Ken was traveling with him also, to change the schedule, to decide what was going to be done, and just because secretarial help was needed. Although I was primarily working for Ken O'Donnell, I was still working for Sorensen helping with speeches when there were last minute changes in speeches, and press copies had to be got out, and people had to take dictation and stay up all night and do this work.

ALDRICH: Well, let's start with Sorensen. You'd already worked for him at a more leisurely pace. What was it like? It's an incredible. , .

LEMPART: Well, there was a great deal more pressure because, of course, there wasn't as much time, and the difference between a man making ten speeches a week and making perhaps thirty speeches a week was where all of the pressure did come in. And the Senator did insist at that time on looking over every speech and then, of course, consulting with various political people when he arrived in the state. And they'd say, "Well, the subject matter that was prepared for this area isn't suitable. People are more interested in another issue." So the speech had to be changed completely, dealing with the issue at hand rather than something that was a pretty dead issue at this point. And although, as I said before, the advance men went into these areas and found out all of these things, the complexion of something like this can change in two or three days. I mean, suddenly they're not interested in Quemoy and Matsu. They're more interested in Laos or maybe some domestic program, medical care for the aged or something of this sort, so that, despite the fact that they would try to prepare as much in advance as they could, there were so many last minute changes in the issues at hand that it had to be done all over again.

ALDRICH: Can you think of. . . . What would happen? The president would receive, as I understand it, a set speech, really, that he delivered all over the place. And we know about that.

LEMPART: You mean using the same speech in many different areas?

ALDRICH: Yes, the same rhetoric was there always. "We've got to get this country moving again," and so on. But the details of how he modified this for local consumption, particular consumption, are unknown to me in any cases. You have said that there was the advance team consulting with him. How long, for instance, in advance of arrival would they consult with him?

LEMPART: Well, I believe that most advance men went out about two weeks

before the Senator would be appearing in a certain area and, as I said before, consult the local authorities. And sometimes there were changes in the schedule at this point. They would, of course, report back to Ken O'Donnell's office what the change in the schedule should be or what the set schedule would be at that time, what the, as I say, the issues of interest were to the people in that area. And this information was transferred to the speech writing department. At this point it wasn't just Sorensen and [Richard N.] Goodwin and [Myer] Mike Feldman, as it had been prior to this. There were people from all areas sort of feeding material in for the speech writers although Sorensen, Goodwin, and Feldman did pretty much do the final speeches at that point.

ALDRICH: And where was your place in this interchange? Somewhere between O'Donnell and Sorensen?

LEMPART: I was sort of a floater and doing anything and everything, including packing baggage, packing everyone's dirty laundry for the next whistle stop or something of that sort.

ALDRICH: Did you find yourself typing in mid-flight?

LEMPART: Oh yes, very definitely. On trains where it's almost impossible, and in taxicabs on the way to the airport, or in the plane typing the speech for the next stop which would be in about a half hour or three-quarters of an hour. Anywhere and everywhere. Right in the rally halls, at some points, where it was terribly distracting with all the speech-making and cheering.

ALDRICH: And there Ted Sorensen would be, standing at your elbows, telling you what to say?

LEMPART: Well, he would have dictated all of this before, and it would be in draft form, and our job was to type the speech in its final form in the speech reading copy, which is, you know, the huge type, and then also typing the mimeograph copies for the press people to have because the press people were always given an advance copy of the speech the Senator would be making. So it was a rather involved procedure. Some of the girls in the press department would sometimes be riding along in a pickup truck or a station wagon with the hand-run mimeograph machine in the back of the station wagon, running off their copies of the speech to distribute to the press. It was somewhat like a Keystone comedy.

ALDRICH: That's a very heavy typewriter, the speech-making typewriter, isn't it?

LEMPART: Well, we did have a portable version of the speech typewriter which isn't much larger than a regular portable typewriter and much easier to carry around and set on your lap and go ahead this way.

ALDRICH: Can you remember any particular places that you went to where there were either terrible snafus or happy coincidences?

LEMPART: Well, I remember one place. The Senator had been at Billings, Montana, and made a speech there. This wasn't a snafu, but this was sort of a frightening and funny occasion, too. But he had made a speech at Billings, and from Billings we were supposed to go on to Cheyenne, Wyoming. Well, we left the Billings airport, and evidently the weather at Cheyenne was very bad; the fog was particularly bad. I traveled mostly on. . . . There were three planes in the whole little group. There was the Caroline, which the Senator traveled on all the time; and there were two American Airlines planes, one carrying the press, and then Pierre Salinger's staff would generally travel there so that they could answer any questions and help the press in any way they could; and the other one which carried the television reporters and all the photographers. And we were generally the first to land so that the photographers could get their shots of the Senator getting off the plane, and the overflow of staff who wasn't traveling on the Caroline would be on the photographer-television reporter plane. Of course, the Caroline being a DC-6--or the two engine plane--it was slower than the others, and we were generally the first ones to arrive anywhere. On this particular occasion we were arriving at Cheyenne. Our pilot was just magnificent. He had radioed ahead, and they had said it was pretty bad, but why didn't he attempt a landing anyway. Well, we went down, and we were about a hundred feet away from the runway about an altitude of 500 feet or something like this, really awful. So that didn't work out, and they radioed back to the Caroline and said that it was pretty bad, but they were going to try again, and if we made it, they could certainly make it. So then we tried a second time, and we didn't make it then. This was in the middle of the Rockies, and I hadn't realized that until somebody reminded me that we were not traveling over the sea but in the middle of the Rocky Mountains. So I think we made a third attempt, and we were very, very close to the ground but still quite a ways off the runway. So then we went on to Denver. We arrived at Denver. This meant that everybody had to stay overnight there and that the press and the Senator and whoever he selected to go along with him would have to go back to Cheyenne the following morning so that he could make his speech and then fly back to Denver after that. Well, it seemed that the speech that was prepared for Cheyenne was just, you know, out of the question--just wasn't anywhere near what these people wanted to hear. We arrived in Denver I believe it was about 1 or 1:30 in the morning, and I was called by Mr. Sorensen to go down and take dictation because the speech was being revised. And we worked on it till about 6:30 in the morning by the time we had the speech prepared and the reading copy, the press copies, and everything else. Then the Senator went off at 8 o'clock in the morning to Cheyenne to deliver his speech, and that was that. But I must say that plane experience was pretty awful, and staying up all night doing the speeches was pretty typical of what went on during the campaign.

ALDRICH: How did these people react? How did you and your fellow workers react to this terrible physical strain? Did anybody crack up?

LEMPART: No, they didn't. Actually everybody did beautifully and you just. . . . I think we were probably all working on nervous energy. Physically, sometimes you think it wouldn't be possible, but it was possible to stay up for thirty or forty hours and constantly be on the go and under pressure doing these things. No, I don't recall that anybody did really crack up, maybe some members of the press did--only because they were traveling with the candidate they weren't simpatico with. [This was said in jest!] Because the reporters were always. . . . I think most of the newspapers and periodicals and television people assigned a reporter to travel with Kennedy for perhaps a week or two and then shifted that reporter over to Nixon, and the person who had been traveling with Nixon would come with us. And it was rather interesting to sort of get the story from these people of how things were going along on the Nixon campaign.

ALDRICH: You had some contact with the press?

LEMPART: Oh yes.

ALDRICH: Teddy White says that the press was, all of them practically, on the side of Kennedy, sympathetic to Kennedy.

LEMPART: Yes, I believe that's pretty accurate. There were four or five who I can think of who were really pro-Nixon and who didn't . . .

ALDRICH: Oh? Really?

LEMPART: Yes.

ALDRICH: Well, who, for instance?

LEMPART: Well, a reporter called Howard Norton from the Baltimore Sun. I remember him particularly being pro-Nixon and . . .

ALDRICH: Why do you remember him particularly?

LEMPART: Why do I remember him particularly? Well, we often sat and sort of chatted with the press and asked them what they thought of the crowd that had been there to receive the President at such and such a place. Most of them were very enthusiastic or would say, "It's not great, but no one would get a large crowd here." And Norton was the type who was always saying that things were bigger and better for Nixon and that, you know, people seemed to be responding to Nixon a great deal more. And I think that he was very definitely--I don't recall exactly what he said that made me think this, but I'm sure that he said many things that indicated he was for Nixon. I don't remember who the Baltimore Sun supported. I think they did support Nixon, as a matter of fact.

ALDRICH: Oh, quite likely, yes. White makes this point over and over again that, thanks to your efforts and the efforts of the whole campaign team, the press were well-received, treated intelligently and as

though they were intelligent people, and this was not true of Nixon's relations with the press.

LEMPART: Well, of course, I don't really know what happened with Nixon's entourage, but I had been told that they had been instructed not to talk to the press. Well, of course, you know, we were free to do what we pleased, and if somebody wanted some information and we were able to tell them anything that we knew, certainly we were free to go ahead and discuss the campaign and discuss the Senator in any way.

I do remember one funny incident. One of the television reporters had been traveling with us for a couple of weeks. We had a rather gay group on our plane. Everybody sort of liked to party when they could have a chance to relax, when we were on flights that would take some length of time. They christened our plane, I believe, "The Jolly Roger" or something like that because it was such a gay party group. And he left us to go and travel with Nixon for two weeks, and we received a telegram to "The Jolly Roger" and he said something like, "Well, fun and games are over with. Now I'm with truth and purity. I'm completely bored." But I think when he came back--we did see him after that--he said that the whole atmosphere with the Nixon people was terribly austere, that they couldn't get near the candidate to speak to him at all, and the people on the staff were very close-mouthed and would not even speak to the press, as a matter of fact, even answer them the time of day or discuss the weather, for that matter.

ALDRICH: Well, now this went on for almost the entire campaign from July through November?

LEMPART: No. Actually, the national campaign didn't start until Labor Day weekend, and the first trip was Alaska, Anchorage and Palmer, Alaska.

ALDRICH: And you were on all of them?

LEMPART: Well, not all of them. I traveled for about a month and then went back to the Committee for about two weeks--I was somewhat physically exhausted at that point and needed a rest period--and then picked up again just about two weeks before the campaign was over. But one of the most exciting times, I think, was the first debate in Chicago. And this was a point where everybody worked terribly hard, and we were all locked up in a hotel room for about thirty straight hours where everybody sat around and discussed and tried to think of what questions might come up. They were really prepared. I think they had about two volumes of material for the Senator to read the day before the debate.

ALDRICH: "They" being again Sorensen. . . .

LEMPART: Well, the "brain trust" or whatever you want to call them: Sorensen and Feldman and Goodwin and. . . . Let's see, who else was there? I believe that they were the three who were the

principal characters in this.

ALDRICH: Were there any TV advisors, that is to say, specialists at the art of image making?

LEMPART: Yes, well Leonard Reinsch who--I can't recall exactly what his background was but he had been involved. . . . He had had something to do with the 1956 Convention, where he was sort of the public relations man or programming man for that and had also fulfilled the same role in the 1960 Convention in programming or something or other. And he was the one that was the logical choice in the national campaign. I do remember also that someone from the Democratic National Committee who worked for Mr. Reinsch traveled with us constantly. I don't remember exactly what his function was, but he was there to make sure that I don't know whether it was the spot commercials or the political spots or announcements or whatever TV programming had to be done was done.

ALDRICH: You don't remember his name?

LEMPART: The name of the man who traveled with us was Jack Christie.

ALDRICH: Christie? Because we're always looking for further people to. . . .

LEMPART: Oh, he'd be terrific. Also very amusing.

ALDRICH: So there you were locked up in that hotel room.

LEMPART: For thirty hours. That's no lie.

ALDRICH: What were you doing there?

LEMPART: Well, they would sit around--by they, I mean Messrs. Sorensen, Goodwin, and Feldman--would sit around and sort of discuss what issues were not already covered in this memorandum, this voluminous memorandum that they had for the Senator, and contacting various people and asking for their ideas, whether they thought of any issue that might be brought up during that particular debate. I mean all of that is very foggy to me because I just remember being very tired and going through medical care and social security and all of the domestic issues and all of the foreign policy issues. I couldn't single out anything in particular that they were concerned about at the time.

ALDRICH: I see, and you were doing what for them?

LEMPART: Well, taking dictation and adding to this memo they had already prepared. I think in the memo they sort of gave both sides of the picture, the pros and cons of various issues. As I said before, I don't remember exactly what was going on.

ALDRICH: Did you look at the debate?

LEMPART: I did, yes. We went over to the television studio, and although we weren't allowed into the studio room where it was being televised, we were permitted to watch it right there. The whole complexion of the campaign changed after this debate, though. Before this, the crowds were very, well, not terribly small, but they weren't the largest, and they weren't terribly enthusiastic. The press people mentioned the fact that until the World Series was over, the people don't get enthused about politics. But it just seemed that the day after the debate. . . . I think we went to Ohio. I think we went through Cleveland and other parts of Ohio the day after the debate, and all of a sudden you saw this mass of humanity, and you found the leapers and the bounders and the runners at this point. The press had sort of categorized all of the spectators as being leapers or jumpers. People had these various ways of showing their enthusiasm for the candidate. But it really changed then. Everybody became very excited about this. Of course, Senator Kennedy, having had the upper hand in that first debate, it was sort of understandable why people were changing their minds about him.

ALDRICH: Did you sit in the studio?

LEMPART: Yes. But, as I say, in a separate room watching the whole thing on TV.

ALDRICH: On TV?

LEMPART: Yes, I believe that even members of the press had to watch the debate this way. There were only a certain number of reporters, pool reporters and pool photographers, who were allowed in the room itself where it was being broadcast.

ALDRICH: Right. Did you meet the enemy? Did you see him in the flesh at that time?

LEMPART: No, I didn't. As a matter of fact, I don't ever remember seeing Mr. Nixon at all during the campaign. I'd seen him in the Senate Office Building and after that but not during the campaign.

ALDRICH: Perhaps we ought to leap then to election night and so on unless you can. . . .

LEMPART: No, there's nothing I can add to that.

ALDRICH: More of the same. Where were you on election night?

LEMPART: Election night I spent at the Bob Kennedys' house. We were all set up, situated there; all of the aides to the Senator were there. About ten of us from the staff, the secretaries from the staff were to man these telephones that we had set up there where our local people were calling in and giving us the returns before we could possibly get them from NBC or CBS.

ALDRICH: So that was a very busy night?

LEMPART: Well, it was in one way, and it wasn't in another. I think it was fairly quiet when everything started off. And I must say that that was an evening where everybody was rather tense. This was the big moment, and it either was or wasn't going to be. Earlier in the evening, I mean, things were just going so beautifully that everybody was in a state of elation and sort of celebrating and planning what they were going to do for the next four years, but as the evening progressed and the Senator's plurality started diminishing, well, then it was a pretty tight moment.

ALDRICH: Can you remember any stories from that evening? I mean, were you chained to your seat at the telephone?

LEMPART: Well, we were because we wouldn't dare leave in case someone did call. I remember we drank lots of coffee and lots of beer and sort of chewed our fingernails and watched three different television sets. The Senator did come over to the house very late in the evening, I remember that. And, of course, Bob Kennedy was there all evening long, and Lou Harris was also there. He was sort of projecting the figures as we were getting reports from the people who were assigned to local counties or whatever it was. I don't remember that there was anything terribly--I mean, you know, it was all terribly exciting, but I can't pinpoint one particular incident.

ALDRICH: Had you run into Lou Harris before?

LEMPART: Yes, because Lou Harris had done the polls for the Senator prior to his entering the Wisconsin primary campaign and West Virginia.

ALDRICH: How much weight do you think he pulled in the brain trust, so to speak?

LEMPART: Well, it's hard for me to say, really, because I wasn't that involved in what was going on, nor did I know that much about what was going on. I think he did quite a bit, though. I think he had Wisconsin pretty well pegged, and, of course, the confidence in his ability was pretty strong at that point. And then I think he was pretty right about West Virginia, too. I think one place he failed was Ohio in the general election. He projected that differently.

ALDRICH: All those, the leapers and jumpers couldn't vote. They were too young to vote. Well, did you stick it right through until-- I think it was somewhere quite late in the morning?

LEMPART: Well, we left. . . . Yes. We stayed at the Bob Kennedys' house until about 4:30 or 5 o'clock that morning. Well, the Senator, I believe had, left about 3 or 3:30 after Mr. Nixon had come out and talked to his own group in Los Angeles or San Francisco--someplace

in California--and he wasn't about ready to concede. I must say, the Senator had a great deal of compassion for him at that point, and he said he didn't blame him and that he wouldn't either because Pierre evidently had placed a call in to see what the Vice President was going to do, whether he was going to stick it out or concede. And so the Senator just laughed and said he was going home and going to bed, and everybody else should do the same thing. But I think we stayed there till about 4:30 or pretty close to 5 o'clock in the morning. And there wasn't quite as much enthusiasm at that point as there had been earlier in the evening.

ALDRICH: No, of course not. You say the Senator was absolutely cool?

LEMPART: Oh, he was. He was just marvelous. He was smoking his cigarillos that evening, going around and chatting, making small talk with everyone and occasionally asking what had been reported from our own people, and he was constantly checking the TV. But it was more of a social evening for him. I don't know whether he had decided he wasn't going to worry about it and come what may, but he didn't show any deep concern about what was going on, superficially he didn't.

ALDRICH: Extraordinary. Well, he did win. And then what happened to you?

LEMPART: Oh gosh, I think it was back to the Senate Office Building form.

ALDRICH: No holiday?

LEMPART: No holiday. I think a three day holiday or something like that. I went back to Washington. At this point the Senator had gone down to Palm Beach, and most of the aides went down there with him. I didn't know exactly what I was going to be doing in Washington. But then after I had been back in Washington for a few days, Mr. O'Donnell called, and I went down to Palm Beach, and we all worked down there for about two weeks, I believe it was, or ten days. It was sort of the office away from the office.

ALDRICH: Pleasanter than the office?

LEMPART: Oh, it was. It was very nice sitting by the pool and taking dictation, having the telephone right beside you.

ALDRICH: What sort of work were you doing? Were you working with O'Donnell again?

LEMPART: Yes. Working with him and just sort of answering the mail, clearing all of his phone calls or taking the phone calls, handling the things that I could. Everything was sort of a hodge-podge at that point, and nobody had been appointed to any particular position so no one quite knew what they were doing. You were doing everything and anything.

ALDRICH: Did you have anything to do with the writing of the Inaugural Address?

LEMPART: No, I didn't. No, not at all. We stayed down in Palm Beach for about ten days and then came back to Washington, and I went back to the Committee. At that point everything was still much of a hodge-podge. I don't know whether Ken had been appointed appointments secretary at that point or not, but anyway, he was still sort of overseeing things politically, and I think that he did have something to do with the appointments of lesser people in government--not the Cabinet members or anything of that sort because I remember people like General [Godfrey T.] McHugh, who was Colonel McHugh at the time, and General [Chester V.] Clifton had come over to see him. Evidently, the Senator or President-elect had asked him to follow through on all of these people and, you know, sort of report to him on what they were like and what his recommendations were, things of that nature. I just don't remember what we did at that point, except anything and everything and sort of preparing for the Inaugural. But then the Senator did go down to Palm Beach, and the speech writing crew went down there, and that was when the Inaugural address was done. So I had absolutely nothing to do with that.

ALDRICH: That brings us to the Inauguration. Where were you during that time?

LEMPART: I was still at the Democratic National Committee. There was nothing. . . . I mean, everybody was living on cloud nine and sort of anticipating everything that was going to happen.

ALDRICH: Did you know what your fate was going to be then?

LEMPART: I think pretty much so. Except that it was really funny because I believe the day that some announcements had been made about the White House staff, it was reported in the press that I was going to be Evelyn Lincoln's assistant secretary. At this point I just didn't know what was going on or where I was going to be although I had talked to Ken O'Donnell, and he had asked if I would continue working for him. So I thought that that was where I would end up and where I did.

ALDRICH: Now O'Donnell's office was adjoining the Oval Room.

LEMPART: The President's. That's right.

ALDRICH: It's going to be very difficult, I'm sure, for you to pick your way through the next thousand days, but can you just give me a brief description of what your duties were; how they fitted into his duties?

LEMPART: Well, first of all, I'd like to start with the point before we actually went into the White House. The transition was being made, and members of the Senator's staff who were being appointed to these White House positions were being invited over to visit their contemporaries in the past Administration, and Mr. O'Donnell suggested one day--

this was before the Inauguration--that I go over to the White House and visit the people who I would be working with and who were at this point fulfilling the roles that we would eventually take over. And I think it was a very enlightening and very interesting experience for me because, as you know, the Kennedys are sort of informal and rather personal people. And I went over to this very austere atmosphere and these girls who I met were very charming, explained--I was sort of interested in knowing how the White House operated, what went on there--and they sort of explained the whole set-up. I asked about the protocol in the White House, and they were filling me in on this. Well, it was just the most awesome moment that I've ever spent in my life as they told me that when the President walks through the halls of the White House, everybody runs back into their office and hides from the rest of the world. Some sort of a buzzer was supposed to sound, and this was to alert you that the President would soon be walking through the halls and that no one should be walking through at the same time, that they should be hidden from his sight. Oh, I can't remember what. . . . Oh, none of the girls or the women in the White House were ever to enter the President's office without specifically being asked by him to enter for some reason or other, and that even if your boss didn't happen to be around, you should run down the hall and find some other man there and send him in because protocol forbade a woman to enter the President's office without being. . . . Well, this was all so strange to me and so awful. Well, all of this changed, but I must say that this first conversation with these people I was actually afraid to walk through those gates and go into the place for fear that I'd always be doing something wrong. *after:*

ALDRICH: Did they give you the impression that they were unhappy working in this atmosphere?

LEMPART: Oh, no. They weren't unhappy at all. They sort of enjoyed the prestige of working in the White House, and they were quite pleased with the work that they were doing. I don't know whether you'd call it militaristic, or what it may be, but they were just so awed by this man who was President of the United States--and I think everybody should be, but not to this extent where they lived in constant fear of him. And they very rarely saw President Eisenhower, evidently because it wasn't often that he'd ever step out of his office and sort of condescend to speak to any other members of the staff. It was sort of run like a military camp or something. Some of the staff went in at 7 o'clock in the morning because he was an early riser and believed in doing things the first thing in the morning and quitting earlier in the day, which was completely opposite to what we did.

ALDRICH: So you trundled your filing cabinets into eventually the office you were to inhabit? Did you work in a separate room from O'Donnell or in the same room?

LEMPART: The office that we were in, adjoining the President's--or the hall that eventually adjoined the President's--was a huge, very large office, and traditionally there had been about three or four

people--the appointments secretary and two or three people from his own staff--sitting in that particular office. So we were all physically located in one room. There was Mr. O'Donnell and then three of the girls, myself and the two other girls on the staff in that office in the first days.

ALDRICH: Who were the two other girls?

LEMPART: Well, one was a girl who had been on the White House staff for several years. She had been the personal secretary to the previous appointments secretary, Tom Stephens. Her name was Helen Colle. Then another girl who had worked with us in the Senate and through the campaign was also in the office, Pauline Fluet.

ALDRICH: What were your duties there, again normal secretarial duties?

LEMPART: Normal secretarial duties. And then Mr. O'Donnell took care of the President's daily calendar, his projected schedule, and everything else. We had to record appointments as they were made and each day issue a daily schedule to all of the assistants, all of the aides at the White House, giving them the on record and off record appointments. There were certain appointments that weren't announced to the press for either security reasons or other reasons that were kept off the schedule that was released to the general public and to the press. So this was a matter of just seeing that the schedule was distributed to the people who needed it and sort of handling all the correspondence having to do with it, too. Mr. O'Donnell's function was much more widespread than just handling appointments, but most of the girls on the staff were generally concerned with the appointments, the schedule work only. He was the liaison with the Democratic National Committee; he still kept his role in working with political people from various states; and he was sort of the--I don't know whether you'd call him an administrative officer or what, but our office also kept the files of FBI reports on people who were being considered for government positions or had been appointed, and things of that nature.

ALDRICH: Oh, I see. Things of that nature. I wish we could go on about that. In a given day, how many off-the-record appointments were there?

LEMPART: Off-the-record appointments, there probably weren't terribly many. I mean the people who were kept off record were people who were usually coming in to discuss national security matters. It wasn't feasible at this time to announce their appearance at the White House because it was something that was probably going to happen weeks or days from then, and the press immediately became suspicious if they knew that somebody who had been an expert on Laos or Vietnam or something like that had been coming there. So these people were kept off record. A great many political people were kept off record also. If Mayor Robert F., Jr. Wagner was having some sort of a problem in New York, and he wanted to see the President for a few minutes to get his advice or help or just discuss the situation with him, this was kept off record also. I don't exactly know

the reason, except I guess it was better politically that the press didn't know about this, so that there weren't very many. There were probably two or three off record appointments in a day.

ALDRICH: I see. Isn't there some place that the press could station themselves?

LEMPART: Well, there was--the west lobby. There was a huge lobby, not adjoining our office but not very far from our own office, not very far from the President's office where the press stayed.

Mr. Salinger would have briefings, I believe, in the morning at about 11 o'clock and brief the press on what was going on that day, that morning. And then he'd also have a press conference or a briefing later on in the day about 4:30 or 5 o'clock, announce the schedule for the following day at that point, and then also discuss with them anything that happened that particular day. Many of the reporters just sat there all day long waiting for something to break. And many of them just came in and went to the briefings in the morning and the afternoon and would leave. If there was anything of interest politically, or otherwise, they would be there; they'd sort of settle themselves there all day long. Or if there was anything of importance, or they felt was of importance, on the President's schedule, they would station themselves out there and wait for the President's caller to leave. And they'd sometimes hold a press conference right then and there in the west lobby to interview him.

ALDRICH: Right. So you could say that there was a tacit agreement between the White House and the press corps that even if the press corps knew that Robert Wagner was there, if they also knew that it was off the record, they wouldn't bother you.

LEMPART: Well, many times they discovered who might be coming in, but everybody's, or all the staff's, job was to see that the purpose of the visit or the fact that this particular person was coming in was not described to the press. I mean really there wasn't any agreement because they were persistent at times like this when they happened to discover that somebody was there and it had not been announced. They were always very persistent to find out what he had been there for and would many times use devious means to try to get to that particular person. Many off record appointments or people who had off record appointments would come in through the East Wing of the White House, which is where the social offices were and the police were stationed, rather than coming through the west wing where they might be seen by one of the reporters. Or they would come through the basement entrance in the west wing where reporters were not supposed to be, but would occasionally be, since they had to use the same road leaving the White House. So that it was a pretty tough job to try to, you know, keep them from knowing what was going on. Usually they discovered that Wagner or Mayor [Richard J.] Daley or somebody of this sort had been there. They seemed to have more. . . . Well, I would say that probably what you said before, that they did have this tacit agreement about off

record people, was true as far as national security matters were concerned. Once they felt that this was the reason, they wouldn't try to pursue it because they knew that they wouldn't be successful in getting any information anyway. But political people were different.

ALDRICH: You used an unusual phrase. You said the social wing.

LEMPART: Well, by that I mean because the social secretary's office was located in the east wing. I sort of call that the social wing for some reason.

ALDRICH: No, I've heard this before, though. Was there rivalry between the two wings?

LEMPART: No, there wasn't, except our work was almost completely divorced, and we had little occasion to. . . . Well, our office did, I think, perhaps more than any other office in the west wing because we had to consult with them on scheduling social affairs; when the President was available for something that Mrs. Kennedy was planning socially; or whether Mrs. Kennedy was available for something social that had to be done on state visits or something of that sort. But it was like living in two different worlds. I mean these people were handling all of that type of thing, and sort of the President's business was being done in the west wing.

ALDRICH: Where was Fred Holborn in this?

LEMPART: Well, Fred Holborn's office, I believe, was located in the east wing, but I think you knew what his function was, and. . . .

ALDRICH: Yes, I do. I just wanted to check that.

LEMPART: But there wasn't any great need for him in the west wing, and there was a great lack of space in the west wing, too. Many people, for instance, Mr. McGeorge Bundy's office when we started out was located in the Executive Office Building, which is, you know, just across the little road, as I call it, but it was a nuisance for him to have to run over to the west wing all of the time--I mean come over to the Mansion or the west wing to see the President all the time, so that he finally had some space, rather undesirable space, in the basement of the west wing. But this way it had to work out because of the lack of space.

ALDRICH: How would an average day go, then, for you?

LEMPART: Well, generally it started about 9:30 or 9:45 in the morning. The President would have his first appointment at that hour. Then it would be rather hectic all morning long until he left, which was generally about 1 o'clock or 1:30. If he had a luncheon at the Mansion and had to be there at 1, he'd leave at that time; if not, then he'd leave at 1:30. Then it was generally very quiet because often if he didn't have anything particular going on, he would sort of use a couple of

hours to rest after lunch, and then he'd come back to the office completely refreshed at about 3:30 and then start on the second part of his day, then go on until 7:30 or 8 o'clock at night if he didn't have anything social scheduled in the evening to make it necessary for him to leave earlier.

ALDRICH: Right. Did you see him often?

LEMPART: I saw him very often. He, as I said, was very informal and would sort of skip out of his office all of the time. He always escorted his state visitors out of his office. He generally met them either at the west wing entrance or met them in our office and then escorted them into his. And many times he'd consult members of his staff in our office. He'd happen to think of something and come out and stand in our office and talk to various members of his staff and consult them on different things right then and there.

ALDRICH: Did this ever become routine for you, that you saw the President of the United States standing there?

LEMPART: Oh yes, uh-huh, yes. Very much routine. And as I was saying earlier, these rules of protocol that I had been briefed on were completely let go. Well, for instance, I had been told that every time the President walked into the office you were supposed to stand as a courtesy. Well, of course, it's understandable if the President walks out of his office once or twice a day. But we became like Mexican jumping beans, popping up all of the time until he finally said that there wasn't any reason for us to be doing this, and we should be working rather than . . .

ALDRICH: He said to you?

LEMPART: Yes. He had a great sense of humor. And he sort of looked at us one day as we were jumping up, and he was coming out for about the sixth or seventh time and it was about 11 o'clock in the morning, and he said, "Well, there's no need for you to keep on jumping up and down all of the time. You're wasting time while you can be working." But he was often out there, so it became sort of a normal thing, and you didn't even notice him sometimes.

ALDRICH: Didn't you ever make any correlation between what you'd read in the newspapers that morning and what was going on right there?

LEMPART: Frankly, I learned more from the newspapers than I did from sitting at my own little desk right then and there. The White House was-- it's not that huge, but everything seems to be, everybody's work seems to be so departmentalized that you can't imagine or you don't have the time to find out what was going on in another office. So that I may have known his schedule by heart and known who was seeing him and for what reason or something like that, but what the meat of the matter was, why, I didn't really know. And I didn't try to presume anything, so that generally I learned more from the newspapers than I did sitting at that desk.

ALDRICH: That couldn't have been true in a way because what I'm driving at is this, that in any given crisis, of which there were a number, you could see the man Kennedy there who was about to meet with somebody who was going to try and persuade him to do such and such or not to do such and such. And I wondered--this is a frivolous question--but didn't you ever want to leap up and say . . .

LEMPART: "What's going on, Mr. President? Tell me!" Or, to the caller, "What are you doing here?"

ALDRICH: Yes. I mean, for instance, in the Cuban crisis of 1962, the missile crisis.

LEMPART: Well, the security in the White House was very tight. And, I mean, a Cabinet meeting may have been called, and we might have known that something was going on in Cuba, or something was happening in Berlin, the wall and all of this, but we frankly didn't know what was going on until the President finally decided that he was going to make a public announcement on it. I mean you were rather suspicious, but then you didn't feel that you wanted to ask any questions because you felt that you were sort of violating, you know, security regulations with things of this nature. I mean you may have been in a position where you heard things occasionally or something like that, but then you'd have to presume more than you actually knew. I mean the security was very--I found it very tight in the White House. Cabinet meetings were called or National Security Council meetings were being called at the last minute, and you knew that something was going on, but you frankly didn't know exactly what it was.

ALDRICH: You never knew the agenda.

LEMPART: No, you didn't, no. Well, on a few occasions I may have been called in to take dictation or something like that when the President had to write a memo, or he was doing something official, and this way I would find out what was going on, but these were rare cases. It wasn't that often that it happened. I may have known what was going on in Birmingham two days before it was actually known to the press or something like this. But, you know, you really didn't think of those things at the time. I mean you knew something was happening and you were sort of fed little bits of information, but you didn't know what the overall picture was.

ALDRICH: How about the gossip?

LEMPART: There wasn't very much gossip in the White House, as I remember.

ALDRICH: Not even amongst the staff, the secretarial staff or the . . .

LEMPART: No, I don't recall that we--I mean we may have discussed the fact that we didn't like the way our boss drank his coffee in the morning, or the fact that we were being kept too late, or something of this sort. But I don't think that we ever discussed the, you know,

our jobs that much, what we were doing. I don't recall that we ever did.

ALDRICH: Never discussed such things as "What will the President do about those tankers carrying missiles to Cuba?"

LEMPART: Well, we may have discussed it, but I think we expressed our own opinions on it and not what the official opinion was, or what we knew; I mean whether we knew how Dean Rusk felt about this. We didn't, but I mean if we had, I don't think we would have discussed it anyway. I think we, you know, discussed issues often and what was going on, but never in relation to what we actually knew.

ALDRICH: I see.

LEMPART: Or, you know, never sort of put together the pieces and tried to find out what the whole picture was.

ALDRICH: In other words, you'd say that the security of the White House was founded on the principle of the jigsaw puzzle. In other words, nobody knows . . .

LEMPART: What the other one is doing. The right hand doesn't know what the left is doing, right. You know, maybe this was one of the great ways of insuring the security of the White House.

ALDRICH: Yes.

LEMPART: But you really didn't feel free to discuss what you were doing or what you knew because of the fact that just out of your own general feeling of the security of the White House that you just wouldn't. I mean maybe six months later we'd say, "Oh well, I knew that all along," you know, and sort of prided ourselves in the fact that we knew a little bit more than anybody else did, but discussing it, no.

ALDRICH: Do you remember when Roger Blough came to the White House?

LEMPART: Yes, I do. Distinctly.

ALDRICH: Tell me about that.

LEMPART: Well, the President, I recall, was terribly. . . . Roger Blough called the office first, and I believe he called. . . . I was the one who took his original call, as a matter of fact, or took the call from the person who was calling for him. And he requested an opportunity to see the President. Mr. O'Donnell wasn't there at the time. I think it was during the lunch hour, and Mr. O'Donnell was out, and the President was at the Mansion. I said that I'd ask Mr. O'Donnell about it when he returned from lunch. He said--or whoever it was--said that it was terribly important and that, you know, something had to be done immediately.

So I took the number and found Ken O'Donnell and told him that Mr. Blough had called and, what should I do about it. So he said he'd take care of it. And he called Mr. Blough back, and evidently, Mr. Blough at the time gave him some indication of what he wanted to see the President about. If I remember--you know, I keep on saying I remember it as though it were yesterday--but I believe that Mr. O'Donnell did call the President at the Mansion while he was resting and told him that Blough had called; and he had set up an appointment; and would he be back in time for it? Or he wanted to make sure that he would be back in time for it. I think that, you know, they knew at that point what Mr. Blough was coming in for. This was made an off record appointment, as a matter of fact. Mr. Blough was asked to come in through the west basement entrance. He did come in. The President was sort of steaming and terribly upset just anticipating the interview. Mr. Blough went in, and I must say that I had never seen the President quite so upset about anything, even matters of national security, as he seemed to be that particular day. But I mean my own feeling was that it was sort of a breach of contract, and this he thought was completely unfair. Mr. Blough went in, and the interview, as I remember, was very brief. I guess one said his piece and the other one said his piece, and with this Mr. Blough left. The President came out to our office to talk to Mr. O'Donnell and really terribly upset and just fuming.

ALDRICH: How upset? Do you remember?

LEMPART: How upset? Just plain mad.

ALDRICH: What was he saying?

LEMPART: Well, I don't think we could put that down on the tape.

ALDRICH: Sure, sure you can.

LEMPART: But, you know, he said . . .

ALDRICH: Now, Helen, seriously, what was he saying?

LEMPART: [Laughter] Well, he called him a son of a bitch and a bastard and everything else. And he said, you know, after sitting at a conference table all of these days with these labor people and giving them his word, how could he possibly go through this right now? I don't remember all of his exact words, but he was just upset about the fact that all this had happened.

ALDRICH: What was he like when he was mad?

LEMPART: Well, it wasn't very often that I saw him mad. This was one of the rare occasions. He seemed to be terribly concerned about the people in labor, who had sort of accepted what management had offered in the beginning, and the fact that they were being, you know, I

mean Blough was being a traitor to the whole thing. I can't, you know, I can't describe exactly how. . . . How do I compare it? I don't know, except . . .

ALDRICH: Well, I know how Eisenhower looked when he was mad. He'd get sort of bright red in the face.

LEMPART: Well, he wasn't red in the face, but his eyes seemed to be--I mean you could just tell. You could read anger written in his face. And he sort of, he was sort of reconstructing the whole thing; saying there was a meeting this long ago, and, you know, labor had asked for this and management offered that; this is the way it all. . . . He was being very, sort of going back over the whole thing and sort of recreating everything that had happened and why. He just couldn't understand why the steel company should go back on their word, and you know, what was the reason for this after having given their word. But he was sort of re-viewing the whole thing in his mind; sort of arguing. He was pitting himself against Mr. O'Donnell, and Mr. O'Donnell was Roger Blough and, you know, "Roger Blough, why did you do this? Why are you doing this?" He went through the whole thing point by point and tried to, I guess tried to find out what the reasoning had been behind all of this.

ALDRICH: Never could find out, could he?

LEMPART: No, I don't think he did, but it was one of the most upsetting. . . . I'd say that was one of the real crises in the White House.

ALDRICH: Do you remember who was with Blough, if anyone?

LEMPART: No, Blough came in by himself, very much by himself. He sort of looked like the cat who ate the canary going into the office; he really did. Excuse that phrase, but really he just seemed to be, you know, very dapper and just sort of swaggered into the office and came out a very different man. Roger Blough was the one who was really white walking out of that office. [Laughter]

ALDRICH: Well, I'll tell you sometime my interview with Roger Blough. Can you remember any other such. . . . Do you remember [Andrei A.] Gromyko's visit just before the Cuban crisis?

LEMPART: Well, I do remember Gromyko coming in, and I do remember the Soviet Ambassador coming in. But these people were so placid that you couldn't really tell what was going to happen or what their reaction was as they came out because the expression was very much the same as they entered as when they came out.

ALDRICH: Did they bring their own interpreters? A foreigner--would he bring his own interpreter or would there be a White House interpreter?

LEMPART: Generally I believe that it was somebody from the State Department. Most of the foreign visitors were accompanied by some State Department official who specialized in that particular area of the world. As I remember--whose visit was it? Was it Gromyko's or. . . . I just remember that this very attractive woman from the State Department was the interpreter for most of the Russian visits. I think there were some articles done about her. She was 27 or 28 at the time and spoke the language beautifully and was really one of the best interpreters that the State Department had. But all of the. . . . I think generally on state visits there were two interpreters. There was one from the State Department, and then there was one accompanying the group who was either from the embassy of the country or somebody that they brought along with their own entourage. But yet generally on state visits when somebody came to see the President, there would be an entourage of people: the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Finance, and you know, four or five ministers, the ambassador of that particular country, and maybe three or four other people who were. . . .

ALDRICH: What about the pols?

LEMPART: The politicians who came to the White House?

ALDRICH: Yes. Who were the most frequent visitors?

LEMPART: Mayor Daley of Chicago was one of the most frequent, I would say. And Mayor Wagner came rather frequently.

ALDRICH: Do you know what the agenda was there, in general? I know both of those men had problems, one of them still does, but you never knew what the . . .

LEMPART: No. I'm trying to think of whose visit it was--it was either Mayor Daley's or Mayor Wagner's--when I was sort of left on my own. His appointment was rather late, and I had to go out and speak to the press. This was one of the worst moments of my life because they were like a group of vultures coming towards me. It had been an off record appointment, and then they finally decided just after the Mayor went in to announce it to the press because the President was going to have him over to the Mansion for a drink and keep him there for a while and then let him go on his merry way without having to face the press. So I was the one, the only person left there at the time that they left the office, to go out and face the press. I do remember that I knew what had gone on at the meeting, but of course I wasn't able to reveal it to the press, but I can't think what it was.

ALDRICH: But you don't remember now?

LEMPART: Yes. You know, if I think back on this particular incident, I'm sure I will eventually.

ALDRICH: How about the congressional contingent?

LEMPART: Well, they were always on record.

ALDRICH: [John W.] McCormack and [Michael J.] Mansfield, et cetera.

LEMPART: You mean how often did they visit?

ALDRICH: Not how often, but I'm looking more for generalizations at this point.

LEMPART: Well, these people very rarely came to visit individually. There was a congressional breakfast every Tuesday morning, and I believe everyone spoke his piece at this particular meeting. So there was very little occasion for them to request individual appointments, unless it was in behalf of some constituent who they would accompany or something like that, and those weren't terribly important.

ALDRICH: Wilbur Mills over Medicare.

LEMPART: Yes. And Adam Clayton Powell came occasionally on the subject of education. I don't remember that much about it. And, you know, Larry O'Brien's office generally sort of . . . I mean we would schedule the appointment, but what the subject of the discussions was we really didn't know. And their office sort of kept that record and knew exactly who was coming for what, so that we just, you know, set them up on the calendar. But we very rarely. . . . If a congressman was requesting an appointment with the President, he always called Larry O'Brien's office rather than calling Ken O'Donnell's. Then Larry would call Ken and say, "Well, Congressman So-and-so wants to come in to discuss such and such, and I recommend that you make the appointment." Ken always would use Larry's judgment in the matter and make the appointment, so that we weren't that involved in what was going on . . .

ALDRICH: On the Hill.

LEMPART: Yes. In Congress.

ALDRICH: How about the . . . We were talking earlier about the security being founded on the philosophy of letting only those people know one part of the elephant who need to know about that part of the elephant. But in general, interdepartmental harmony was . . .

LEMPART: It was very good. Everybody worked well together, and I must say that there weren't any problems in that respect. So there's no subject of discussion there. No animosities, no. No, you know, the aides to the President were free to come and go. I must say that . . .

ALDRICH: That's really true, is it?

LEMPART: It was, yes. Mr. Sorensen could walk into his office five times a day. I think he'd generally tell Mr. O'Donnell what it was about. And, you know, if the President was free, it was fine. But members of the staff were always coming and going, and the door was open to them all the time, unless it was a terribly busy day. But then a time was set aside for them the next day to see the President, so there wasn't any friction there at all.

ALDRICH: Well, O'Donnell, who knew when the President was free always, then could pop up from his desk and walk into the Oval Room?

LEMPART: Oh yes. Well, he went in there I don't know how many times a day. You couldn't possibly record it. He went in after each appointment, and sometimes he would stay in the President's office for a great length of time, probably discussing what had gone on before this, or just went in there to, you know, make general conversation or something. So he was in there very often. Then all the other aides in the White House were--I mean the President was accessible to them all of the time. There was no problem there at all. Sometimes they resented it because they couldn't go in at that very moment, and they felt that what they were doing was the most important thing at the moment. But a time was always allotted to them, you know. They were either told to come back at 7:30 that evening when the President's schedule would be clear and he'd have all of the time in the world or to come back the next morning at an appointed hour. Many times when we were leaving, and his daily schedule, his official schedule was over with, he'd just open the door, and people were free to come in and go as they wanted. He was always willing to see them then. So many of them would work on that basis, that, you know, the end of the day was theirs to have with him and discuss their problems.

ALDRICH: I see. Were there any what you would call bull sessions at those times?

LEMPART: Oh, yes. I think frequently there were. I think many times somebody would go in just to have him sign some particular letter or make his recommendation on some memo they had prepared. Or, if they had prepared a memo for him which would probably take about five or ten minutes to read and sign, they'd stay in there for an hour or so, and he'd just sort of review the past month's business or something of that sort with them. But there were many times--I mean his official schedule generally ended at about 6:30 in the day, and then everybody sort of went in then.

ALDRICH: Well, thank you. Helen, this is really very good, damn it.

BEGIN TAPE II SIDE I

ALDRICH: We've talked a lot about the times the Senator--I mean the President,

by this time--came into your office there. Was there any difference between the man you knew as a Senator and the man you knew as President? Many people have commented on this in different ways.

LEMPART: I don't think there was really, basically, in the person himself. I think probably everybody looked at him with a great deal more awe, and you couldn't help but think that this was the President of the United States, and he held the nation's fate in his hands. This was a much bigger person, or his office was that much more important. But the person, he as a person, remained exactly the same as he had been in the Senate days. Probably a little bit more cautious about what he said officially and what he did than he had been in the Senate days, but basically, he was unchanged.

ALDRICH: The photographs show a certain marked difference in his appearance. I wondered. . . .

LEMPART: Well, I mean during those last couple of years in the Senate and during the campaign, here was a man who was traveling constantly, he was perhaps not getting the nourishment he needed, you know, losing sleep and everything else. And he did lose a lot of weight, and at this point he sometimes looked rather gaunt. I think he made an effort after the campaign was over with to relax and sort of adjust to his new type of life. His physical appearance changed somewhat at that point. He gained some weight, and I think he did this purposely. And he was more, well, in some ways more relaxed looking than he had been during those campaign days.

ALDRICH: I see. Was there any talk in the office about his various ailments?

LEMPART: No, there wasn't at all, not until the time of the Canadian trip when he. . . . Of course, this was the first sort of crisis in the White House about his health when he had been planting a tree in Ottawa or something of this sort and wrenched his back, and this started acting up again. But during the campaign he seemed to be in fine physical shape. In the interim between the campaign and the Inauguration, he was fine there also. So there wasn't really. . . . The only instances I remember in the White House was the tree planting ceremony when he wrenched his back and another time where he really had a bout with the flu which was pretty bad, and, you know, everybody sort of worried about how everything was going to be after that or what the results would be or how serious the illness was at the time. I think that was the one and only time really in the White House that, you know, the press ever knew about what was going on and everybody was--well, the whole nation was sort of concerned. It was a flu. I think it was rather serious, but not quite as serious as it was built up to be.

ALDRICH: Did you ever have anything to do with Dr. Janet Travell?

LEMPART: Dr. Travell?

ALDRICH: Travell.

LEMPART: No, very little. Dr. Travell and Dr. [George G.] Burkley, who was the Navy medical officer, were both in the White House. Occasionally, Dr. Travell would come into our office and check the President's chairs to see that they were the right chairs and do things of this sort. But we didn't have very much, I don't know what you'd call it, with her.

ALDRICH: This is off the record, but I was wondering why there was so much amusement in Mrs. Kennedy's office whenever Dr. Travell's name came up.

LEMPART: Well, Dr. Travell was, you know, very concerned about the President's health and his well being and the fact that the chairs that he had been using were the right chairs for his back. And she was sort of one of these grand lecturers who would go around the White House and say, "Well, you're not using the right chair for the amount of typing, or sitting at the desk, that you're doing." You know, "You should get this type of chair or that type of chair." She was concerned about everybody's health, as a matter of fact. If she heard someone sneeze, she's run up and say, "Well, what's the matter with you?" "How long have you been sneezing or coughing?" or things of this sort.

ALDRICH: The housemother type, yes.

LEMPART: She was very much so, and I guess she had treated a lot of the Senator's aides at one time or another, you know, even before his going to the White House. So she had a sort of maternal outlook on their well being and health.

ALDRICH: Like Mrs. Lincoln.

LEMPART: That's right. [Laughter] In a different way, of course.

ALDRICH: Did the children run around your office as much as . . .

LEMPART: No, very rarely. The children were, I think, in the President's office quite frequently, or they went to visit Mrs. Lincoln's office quite frequently. Mrs. Lincoln always had the candy and the coloring books and the things that they were most interested in. And of course, Caroline had known Mrs. Lincoln in years, well, not years back, but had known the name, had known Mrs. Lincoln, and was more inclined to visit her more often than she was any other office. Maybe she stepped into our office a couple of times, but this was chasing her dog or running out to see what was displayed in the Fish Room, one of her favorite ships or something that she had seen before or her mother had mentioned.

ALDRICH: Oh, I see. Well, you said earlier that your memories of the two Cuban crises was pretty vague. What other incidents can you

remember that particularly stick in your mind?

LEMPART: In my mind right now. Particular incidents I just can't remember right now.

ALDRICH: Do you remember seeing Mrs. Kennedy in the White House?

LEMPART: Well, yes, uh-huh. I do remember in the early days in the White House she was terribly interested in the decor in the different offices and she was completely dissatisfied with the way the Fish Room looked, and she did a lot in decorating that. She would go over to the Fish Room, which was right across the hall from our own office, and spend much time rearranging paintings or deciding which paintings should go in there; how the furniture should be reorganized. She sometimes came into our office and would tell us that, you know, our office looked terrible and we should do something about the decor there. These were her very seldom visits to our wing of the White House.

ALDRICH: Did you ever change the decor of your office?

LEMPART: No, I don't think we really did. I think the government prevented us from doing this. Every time we asked for a new rug or new drapes we had to go through the government red tape and justify the reason for requesting all of this, and it was much easier to just let it as it was. I think we finally had our office painted after I don't know how many attempts. Mr. J. Bernard West, who was the chief, no, he wasn't the chief usher. I don't know exactly what his title was, but he was the person who was responsible for seeing that everything that the First Family wanted done in the White House was done, and he was also the person we had to approach when we wanted the office painted or something of this sort. When we first got into the office, in our office in the White House, it had been painted, so they said, just after the Eisenhowers left, and it looked fairly, you know, fairly decent. But then after several months changing pictures or rearranging pictures, the picture hooks had been left just as they were, and the paintings that we had put up there weren't at the right level or something of this sort. So with all of this redecorating, which wasn't very much--it was just a matter of rearranging pictures--the walls looked awful. And we called Mr. West, and he said that it wasn't possible. It had just been painted several months before. Finally, one night the President came out of his office. He was chatting with Mr. O'Donnell and looked around and saw these horrible holes in the walls or picture hooks up or the marks from chairs scraping against the walls and just insisted that it be done immediately. And I explained to him that we had to go through J. B. West, and Mr. West had said no. And he said, "Well, you call him this minute and tell him that I said this office should be painted because it looks so sloppy. It looks terrible, and all of my visitors have to come through this office. There should be some sort of semblance of dignity or something in here."

ALDRICH: Well, now I guess we come, perhaps abruptly, to the assassination.

LEMPART: Well, I mean I can't really because I left the White House in January of 1963, and of course, this was nine months or ten months before the assassination, so I can't really . . .

ALDRICH: Oh, did you? Where did you go then?

LEMPART: I went to Rome.

ALDRICH: Oh, I see. I didn't realize that. Your itch to travel.

LEMPART: That's right.

ALDRICH: Well, in Rome, how did you hear of it in Rome?

LEMPART: How did I hear of the assassination in Rome?

ALDRICH: Yes, where were you?

LEMPART: Well, that particular evening I had gone out to dinner with a group of friends, and of course, we hadn't. . . . This was really--it's sort of like a nightmare when you think of it now. I had gone out to dinner with some friends, and we were going to the theater to see Zi Zi Jeanmaire. I remember that we had had a very pleasant dinner. And of course, the conversation was just sort of nothing. We were leaving this friend's apartment to go on to the theater, and we passed the American Embassy, and we saw all these cars outside of the Embassy and flashbulbs popping. We were late for the theater, so we didn't bother stopping. We just thought it was a sort of a common, everyday automobile accident and that people were getting terribly excited about it. And we went to the theater. We arrived there after the dance had begun. It was during intermission. When we were looking around the theater and found that all these people were reading newspapers, which was very strange for the Italians. I had never seen anybody read a newspaper in the theater before. We were trying to figure out what they were reading about, and we saw one newspaper and it said, "Kennedy hit in the head," or something of this sort. So we left the theater and ran to some drugstore down at the corner and called the Embassy, and we really had a difficult time getting through because the wires were all busy. So we finally called this friend who was one of the decoders for messages at the Embassy. She had been on duty that evening, and we finally got in touch with her, and she told us that the word had come through that the President had been injured and that at this point they weren't absolutely--well, no, I guess at this point she knew. She had said the President was dead. So, you know, we sort of rushed to the car, and on the way to the car we met a girl walking along the street, and all of the other Italian newspapers had said something like, you know, "Kennedy shot in Dallas," but nothing indicated that he had actually been killed. And this girl was reading the Paese Sera I think the name of the newspaper was, which was a Communist newspaper, and it just said, "Kennedy killed." She assured us that this was not confirmed, and that it was a communist newspaper and they might have been saying anything. So we went over to the

Embassy, and of course, at this point, you know, it was a true fact. And there were just hundreds and hundreds of people lined outside of the Embassy waiting to sign the book of condolences. And there were Americans and Italians alike. It was just sort of incredible. You sort of stood there, and you kept on looking at people and saying, "Is it true? Is it true?" You know, it just seemed like a horrible nightmare being four thousand miles away from your own country and reading this. And everybody just sort of said, "Well, you know, this just can't happen in our country, and it doesn't happen in the United States. It can so easily happen over here in one of these countries, but a man so young and a man who has so much to offer the world." I don't recall very much of it except, you know, just chitter chatter of people, and everybody being so distraught. I mean nobody knew quite what to do with themselves at that point. Well, the next day I flew back to the States because it just didn't seem like reality. It just seemed like a horrible dream, and despite the fact that you had the newspapers to reassure you, or assure you that this was true, it just didn't seem very true at all. So I did come home, but just for a couple of weeks.

ALDRICH: Did you go to Washington?

LEMPART: I did. I went directly to Washington from Rome and spent about a week there.

ALDRICH: Were you helping out? Or were you just there?

LEMPART: Well, I arrived very early. It was very early Sunday morning when I arrived here in the States, and I did go to the White House that Sunday morning before the bier was removed from the White House to the Capitol, and I sort of just went around visiting all of the people, you know, with whom I had worked before and sort of doing nothing. I mean everybody was sort of in a state of shock. I think there were a few people who were working on the arrangements for the funeral and all of that, but I didn't become involved in that at all. I mean no one else was really doing any work. We just sat around and sort of stared at each other and tried to figure out what happened and, you know, whether it was actually true or not.

ALDRICH: You were there then when Oswald was shot?

LEMPART: I was in one of the offices in the White House, and some people were watching television, and I remember we were sitting in Dave Powers' office, as a matter of fact, that afternoon. And it was just, you know, it was just about an hour after the, or less than an hour after the. . . . You know, there had been the procession from the White House to the Capitol, and somebody burst in and said they had a television set in their office and that Oswald had just been killed. Everybody's reaction was, "It couldn't happen to a nicer person," or you know "That's the breaks," and "It's the greatest thing that ever happened." Of course, everybody changed their minds after that, but at the time. . . .

ALDRICH: Why did you decide to go to Rome, Helen?

LEMPART: Why? Well, I don't know. I had been to Europe a few times before and really loved it, and particularly loved Rome. My job at the White House had sort of become routine to me at this point and the hours so long, and I just felt that I had to do something else in a way, and this was the greatest thing that I could do because, you know, I had just had this feeling of patriotism instilled in me. It was probably my association with the President or being part of this whole thing, and I just felt that I was going to be a great patriot and preach the way of the United States to everybody else who cared to listen. So it was sort of a combination of what I had always wanted to do myself, and this was the time to do it. I was going to come back to Washington in 1964 to participate in the campaign. I sort of left the White House with that understanding, that this would be sort of a. . . .

ALDRICH: Leave of absence.

LEMPART: Leave of absence and doing what I wanted to do, and come back.

ALDRICH: What was O'Donnell like to work for?

LEMPART: Well, I'm prejudiced. He was very easy to work for. He was a person who sort of, I don't know. . . . Well, he was one who sort of delegated responsibility, and I felt that I was doing a job and that what I was doing was relatively important. He was very easy going. He handled his job himself I think brilliantly, you know, as I had said earlier, that he was a very good judge of people, and he was exactly where he belonged. I don't know. Many people disliked him because he's so direct. He is a very direct person. I mean he doesn't sort of run around the bush, and he just tells the person yes or no to their query. I think some people resented him for this reason. But a lot of. . . . I think more people had a greater admiration for him because he was honest and frank with them at all times.

ALDRICH: It cut right through when he. . . .

LEMPART: In his association with the President, too. I think the President had a great deal of respect for him, and I think it was for the same reason--that he didn't sort of agree with him because it was the expedient thing to do, and he used logic in all of his arguments--not that the President took his advice at all times or even 50 percent of the time. I really don't know, but Ken was well aware of what was going on. He always kept very much in touch with what was going on in all of the government and what was going on in the nation generally. I think he was one of the most underestimated people in the White House. I mean people just thought he was sort of a man who sat there and said yes or no to presidential callers, but he wasn't because the President did trust him and did confide in him on many issues. And Ken was always involved when there was something

going on such as the Bay of Pigs and the Roger Blough thing. He was always aware of what was going on, what the President felt about different things, or what the President's aides or other people in government--they often conveyed their messages to the President through him. So he was a pretty well informed man.

ALDRICH: Yes. What about Dave Powers? Do you know Dave Powers?

LEMPART: Yes, I do.

ALDRICH: What sort of a fellow is he? I don't know whether this is germane to the issue.

LEMPART: Well, Dave is an absolutely great person who doesn't want to be anything more than, you know, the man from Charlestown, Massachusetts and the man who kept the presidential candidate happy and the man who kept the President happy. He was sort of the official greeter at the White House. Anybody who came in to see the President was always met at the west wing door by Dave Powers, and Dave would escort them in. He had a great sense of humor. He was marvelous at the job that he was doing. I mean he was the type of person who, you know, kept everyone happy.

ALDRICH: How did that work? I mean he'd be right there at the door . . .

LEMPART: Well, he would have, of course, a copy of the President's calendar every day, and he knew what time people were expected. His sense of humor is what saved the day so many times because you'd have these people who thought that they were all important and that the President shouldn't be late for their particular appointments. And of course, they had Dave Powers to humor them for fifteen or twenty minutes while the President was finishing up on his last appointment and getting ready to see them. Dave was there to entertain them and keep them happy. Or if he felt that they had no interest in what he had to offer, then he'd just go on his merry way but keep on assuring them that the President would be ready in just a few minutes. He was just sort of a, oh, I don't know, a combination of Laurel-Hardy and Jerry Lewis and everybody else put together. He kept everybody's morale up two hundred points at all times.

ALDRICH: Well, Helen, can you think of anything else you'd like to say because I've run out of questions? I think we've blanketed those many years.

LEMPART: Well, at the moment I can't, no.

ALDRICH: Well, things will come back to you, I'm sure, as you go over this.

LEMPART: They probably will, but right now I just. . . .