

**Dinah Bridge, Oral History Interview – 10/30/1966**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Dinah Bridge

**Interviewer:** Joseph E. O'Connor

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**Biographical Note**

Bridge, a British friend of the Kennedy family, discusses her friendship with, and anecdotes about, John F. Kennedy and his siblings, among other issues.

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Dinah Bridge

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Oral History Interview

with

Dinah Bridge

October 30, 1966  
London, England

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Do you think you can remember when you first met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

BRIDGE: I find it very hard to remember, but I'm sure it was—it must have been in England when they were in the Embassy here, though my aunt, I should think, almost certainly—probably at Cliveden where she lived.

O'CONNOR: Is that because she was in Parliament that you would have met the same people that were familiar to the Ambassador [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.]?

BRIDGE: Probably, yes. She entertained a great deal. And, I'm sure she had them. I think I probably met them all together in a bunch. In fact, I do remember now. I think I met them at the American Embassy. They had a party, and they were all there in a group. And I'm sure that's the first time I ever...

O'CONNOR: That would have been Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.] and Kathleen [Kathleen Kennedy Cavendish], and Robert [Robert F. Kennedy] and Jack Kennedy?

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BRIDGE: The whole lot, I think, really the whole lot except the—I never really remember seeing Rosemary [Rosemary Kennedy], who was not very strong, was she?

O'CONNOR: No. Did anyone in particular stand out, or do you recall anything specific about anyone?

BRIDGE: Not that special evening...

O'CONNOR: Not that time, I mean, but generally in your first impressions of the Kennedys.

BRIDGE: Well, I think Kick stood out, because she was my contemporary, and became a great friend. I saw a great deal of her, really, at one time.

O'CONNOR: How would you characterize Kathleen Kennedy?

BRIDGE: I'd characterize her as being sort of sunshine really. Everybody she saw she always made feel terribly happy and gay. She always came into a room and everybody seemed to sort of lighten up. She was that sort of a character.

O'CONNOR: Do you have any particular impressions of John Kennedy in those days, or did you stand out at all?

BRIDGE: Not so much, I didn't know him very well in those days. I mean I really got to know him much better in Washington. So, not especially an incident that I remember here.

O'CONNOR: Well, how did you get to know him in Washington, what were the circumstances there?

BRIDGE: I got to know him in Washington: I was living in Georgetown, married to an American [Christopher Bridge], and they were around the corner from me. And because I had known them here, we picked up the relationship again, the friendship. I used to see a great deal of them really.

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O'CONNOR: That would have been when, the late forties?

BRIDGE: That would have been in the late forties, yes. Then we used to do down to Virginia occasionally for weekends, and a lot of coming and going

in Georgetown, you know.

O'CONNOR: John Kennedy was a single man at that time, right?

BRIDGE: Yes, he was single at that time.

O'CONNOR: He wasn't married then. Well, what sort of things did he enjoy? What sort of things did you do with him, when any of you would be running around together?

BRIDGE: Well, we used to go to the cinema. And we used to have marvelous meals cooked by Margaret—very rich, usually. And then we used to play games, and sit around and chat, and always music going, endless jazz in the background.

O'CONNOR: Did he seem a very serious person at that time, what really was he like? He was, of course, involved in politics at that time.

BRIDGE: Well, he was very active and had enormous charm and read a lot—a mixture of gaiety and thought.

O'CONNOR: He would have been a congressman in 1948.

BRIDGE: He was, yes. He seemed quite serious, and then suddenly, he'd break away from reading and start to make jokes, and sing a song. But I think he did appear to be quite a serious thinker and always probing into things—literature, politics, etc.

O'CONNOR: We commented a little while ago in talking about his religion, or his attitude toward religion, do you have any remembrances of that at all,

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whether or not you'd consider him a serious Catholic or a good Catholic, whatever it is?

BRIDGE: I wouldn't have thought that he was an especially serious, good Catholic. I think he respected the high-up people in the Catholic Church. And I think he had a great natural respect for them. But I wouldn't have thought you could say he was really a good Catholic himself. I really know very little about that side. I'm sure he went to church and did the right things. But I think Kick was very conscientiously religious. She always seemed to be rushing off to church.

O'CONNOR: That's an interesting way to put it.

BRIDGE: They were always in a hurry. Everything was always sort of, you know, left a bit late, dashing off in a car somewhere.

O'CONNOR: Well, did you have much contact with him, let's say, you were living in Georgetown in the late forties, did you have much contact with him from then on, or were there gaps in....

BRIDGE: Well, you see, I came back to England in 1950. I had some contact earlier in the forties for, I suppose, about a year or two when my father was in the Treasury Delegation in Washington; I was keeping house for my father. And I saw a good deal of the President then. I think I saw—yes, they were in Georgetown then, I think, weren't they? And then I went off to Seattle and Santa Barbara, following the Navy. And when I came back, I saw really more of him. Their house was quite near, and he and Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] were there together.

O'CONNOR: When you saw him in Georgetown, did he ever talk to you about his wartime experiences, or anything like that?

BRIDGE: No, very little. Awfully little.

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O'CONNOR: He had some extraordinary wartime experiences, and I often wondered whether he talked much about that or not.

BRIDGE: No, I don't remember that especially. When I saw him, mostly there were here always a lot of family around, and a great deal of chat about who said what, and did you hear what so-and-so said last night, and how do you think they looked, and what did they say—a great deal of chitchat. But I don't remember that it stood out about his war experiences.

O'CONNOR: How about when you saw him later on? You said you returned to England in 1950. Well, when did you again begin having any contact at all with him? Or any of those Kennedys?

BRIDGE: Well, I didn't really, you see, after '50. I've been living here ever since. And I've only really seen them spasmodically since then, whenever they'd come over, or.... I never saw him after that, except here, when he was visiting, and that sort of thing, I saw him. It was always the same, it never made any difference whether he was President or not President, I thought.

O'CONNOR: You mean he was just as genial after he became President?

BRIDGE: Just the same. Always the same old jokes, you know. You didn't feel at all in awe that he was the President, and you had to say something



very clever. You could pick up the thread as if it was yesterday.

O'CONNOR: Did you ever know Jacqueline Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] at all?

BRIDGE: Not very well. But I've met her. I thought she was a marvelous girl, so attractive.

O'CONNOR: Certainly was that.

BRIDGE: And she's got such a fascinating way of talking.

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O'CONNOR: What do you mean by that?

BRIDGE: Well, that sort of rather eager, breathless way of talking. What she says is, it seemed to me, always very apt, or the things I've ever heard her say. But I really don't know her at all well. Although I think I was probably one of the first people to see her in the Kennedy household.

O'CONNOR: Well, why don't you tell us about that?

BRIDGE: Having breakfast with Bobby. I was staying with Bobby and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] when they had their first baby [Kathleen Kennedy Townsend], at his house. And we were all sitting around having breakfast, and Jack was there, and Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith]. And around the corner of the front door came this beautiful girl in riding clothes to pick up Jean to go riding. And I believe I'm right that that was the first time he'd really taken note of her. And very shortly after that, I think even one night later, or two, she was invited to supper, and lots of games were played, and she was sort of put through her paces, I should think you would say. And she stood up extremely well to the Kennedy barrage of questions.

O'CONNOR: It must have been quite a barrage, too.

BRIDGE: It was quite a barrage. You had to sort of know the form to keep up, you know, because the jokes went so fast, and the chitter chat. But she did extremely well, as I remember.

O'CONNOR: One of the reasons I asked you about whether or not you knew Jacqueline is because there's a lot of comment, before he became President and after he became President, about what sort of marriage he and Jacqueline really had, about how well she fitted into the Kennedy family, which must have been quite a problem, and also how well the two of them really got along. There have

been reports at various times perhaps things weren't going so well, and I wondered if you had heard any of those, or knew anything about that or not, really know how well...

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BRIDGE: Well, I really didn't know, because I only heard about it, but I did hear that they were having their difficulties, and that he was up to one or two things, and this might be a problem, but I really know nothing about their private life after they were married.

O'CONNOR: That's one of the most extraordinary difficult things to investigate, because it is, you know, a particularly personal problem.

BRIDGE: Exactly, it must be impossible, I would have thought, because whoever was involved would surely not go into it, I shouldn't have thought.

O'CONNOR: Well, some people do and some people don't. It depends on—well, it depends on many things. It depends what their attitude is toward, really, what we're doing here.

BRIDGE: Exactly. Exactly.

O'CONNOR: If they feel very secure in what they say, and so forth, why, they are willing to go into it, but it is one of the most difficult problems simply because there is so much rumor attached to the bit of fact that you can find out.

BRIDGE: I know. But I was told, I don't know if this is true, that towards the end, just before he was killed, they really—everything was going very well for them.

O'CONNOR: Yes.

BRIDGE: They got over a great deal, and all the sadnesses about the children, and everything was much better.

O'CONNOR: Yes, people talked about the maturing of John Kennedy after he became President, and they refer not only to his maturing politically, perhaps,

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but to his maturing in all sorts of ways. And I've heard it commented that this contributed a great deal to the solidifying of this marriage, to improving things.

BRIDGE:                   Although they had a great deal in common, they must have been awfully different. She was rather a gentle, quiet character, wasn't she? And suddenly to be bowled into the Kennedy family, you really had to be able to do a bit of shouting to keep up, you know.

I can remember staying with them in Cape Cod—no, down in Florida. Meals were much fun, never dull and very noisy. They'd drink gallons of milk and talk a great deal, and Mrs. Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] would be heard trying to say something at the end of the table. She hardly ever got it out though, didn't have a chance.

O'CONNOR:               That's really kind of a frightening experience, having dinner with them.

BRIDGE:                   Well, it was and it wasn't. Somehow you either felt that it was alright, you were in—and if you were in, that was fine. You could sort of get along alright, I think. I think, really, it was humor that made it possible. You know, it was so funny, so many laughs the whole time.

O'CONNOR:               You said you were having breakfast with Robert Kennedy and his wife when you first met Jacqueline Kennedy, first saw her. Would that indicate that you were closer to Robert Kennedy, or you knew him better, he and Ethel, than...

BRIDGE:                   No, I think I was staying there because I'd gone back to Washington to settle up a lot of things I had to do there, and they very kindly asked me to stay. And I think I stayed with them for about a week then.

O'CONNOR:               I just wondered if you'd care to compare Robert Kennedy and John Kennedy in any way?

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BRIDGE:                   Well, I do remember at that time, actually, what stands out in my mind, that a dinner party was given for me before I was leaving Washington, you see. And Bobby and Ethel came to this dinner because I said I was staying with them, and so they brought us to the party. And I remember that there were some Englishmen at this dinner party, and Bobby had a tremendous set-to on some old political aspect. I can't remember now what it was about. Could it have been about the Philippines or something? The British weren't doing their stuff, they weren't pulling their weight, or something like that. And I do know there was quite a row, which was rather embarrassing really, but I think, in that way, Bobby was more pugnacious. He wouldn't have had the sort of, perhaps sophistication is the word, to know not to voice up at that moment, that it was a bad moment with two Englishmen sitting there to say that the British were being weak, or they had not thought hard enough, or something. And it went very deep, and I do remember it was a very unpleasant moment.

O'CONNOR: I don't suppose John would have been guilty of that sort of thing.

BRIDGE: I don't think he would. I think he would have stood firmly, but he wouldn't have gone out to do battle in a private house like that, I don't think. Well, that's the impression I would had about him.

O'CONNOR: Well, do you have any remembrances of after he became President, when he came over here?

BRIDGE: Well, I just remember—yes, I do remember going to his sister-in-law's house, and meeting him there, and you know, the crowds were outside. It was very warm.

O'CONNOR: This is Lee Radziwill's [Caroline Lee Bouvier Radziwill].

BRIDGE: This is what?

O'CONNOR: This is Lee Radziwill's.

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BRIDGE: Radziwill's yes, the princess. And although there was this great aura of drama and excitement around him, he came across the room just like the old friend and greeted one as if nothing was happening at all, had a long chat about this and that. And what are you up to and what are *you* up to?

O'CONNOR: You mentioned that he also knew your aunt, I think you said something about his calling your aunt, and I wondered if you'd repeat that story, I thought it was....

BRIDGE: Well, I believe I'm right, that he was going from the state dinner at Buckingham Palace to London Airport, and he took the trouble, because he was very fond of my aunt, who was eight-three then, I think, and I believe he took the trouble to go in and just call on her. And of course, she never forgot it until she died. It was a great moment for her, this young President that she had known as a boy in England to come back in all his glory and take the time to call her. So I thought that was really marvelously thoughtful, and loyal, really, because she had done a lot for them when they were first here; she did entertain them a lot; and she introduced them to all the young people here and I think gave them a great start.

O'CONNOR: Well, you knew him when he was younger, and then you, at least, met him several times when he was older. Did you notice any change in him? You commented a number of times on the fact that he as just a friendly when he was President as he was when he was not President. Well, did you notice any change in the man, really?

BRIDGE: Well, I suppose there was a change. You felt he'd been through a great deal. He looked much more, he did look more mature and serious, I thought, really. And also, I felt that you could see he was suffering quite, because my husband has got this back trouble, just the same. In fact, he very kindly took a lot of trouble to find out about my husband's back—I had a letter from the President about it—because of this woman who is so wonderful at the White House.

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O'CONNOR: Janet Travell [Janet G. Travell]?

BRIDGE: Yes, that's the one. And whether it was a good idea to come over there and perhaps see if we could do anything about it.

O'CONNOR: Well, really, John Kennedy felt so strongly that Janet Travell had helped him that he...

BRIDGE: I think I wrote to Eunice, I believe this is right, and I think I got a typewritten letter back from the President saying, this is what, you know, she's a wonderful woman, and he should see her, and so forth. But we never actually took it up because he had to have another operation this side. They had very much the same thing. And I did, I especially took note, because my husband had suffered so with his back, and I did think he looked as if he was suffering when he was here from his back. Do you think he did?

O'CONNOR: He certainly did at various times, he certainly did at various times. Of course, the worst period was in the mid-fifties. But apparently he injured his back, or aggravated the injury in his back, once or twice during the presidency. It think one time when he was lifting up a shovel full of earth, turning—what's the work for it—ground-breaking ceremony.

BRIDGE: That's the whole thing that does start if off again, doesn't it? But, otherwise his health was good, wasn't it?

O'CONNOR: Health was much, much better, certainly, when he was President, than it had been. It had been so bad.

BRIDGE: Really? Isn't that amazing? It shows what resilience he had, doesn't it? They all had pretty good health, I would have thought that. They always seemed in good...

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O'CONNOR: John Kennedy was probably the most frail of the crowd.

BRIDGE: Really? Of all of them, was he? Because of his back mainly, yes. Eunice I wouldn't have thought was terribly strong, really. Perhaps she is, perhaps, she is.

O'CONNOR: She seems pretty strong to me, I don't know. You would know better than I.

BRIDGE: She's quite highly strung, isn't she? More so than the President ever was, don't you think? Although they were so alike that they were almost one human being. I remember one night in Georgetown, Eunice arrived from Chicago, and she said that all her jewelry had been stolen on the plane. Everything she owned was gone. And so the police were called in, and the President, well, he wasn't President then, told the police that this thing had happened, but he remained very calm. I remember how calm he was when this sort of thing happened, and Eunice was desperate. She didn't know how she was going to dare tell him, and then she said, and he was very calm about the police, and the police were there in the house, I think I'm right, and the telephone rang from Chicago, and it was Sargent Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] saying, "All is well, all...." He went on to say, "Your jewelry has been found in the dressing table drawer. Did you know you'd left it here?" And by that time, all the police force were in the house, and everything was at sixes and sevens, and she'd just left the jewelry in her drawer. It's a typical scene in the Kennedy household.

O'CONNOR: My gosh, I hope it's not typical. Well, we can wind this up then, unless you have any other....

BRIDGE: No, not really.

O'CONNOR: ...remembrances at all.

BRIDGE: No, I just-perhaps, Cape Cod, I suppose, is another memory I have of staying up there with Kick. And all his college friends being up

[-11-]

there, and it was terribly lively all the time, tremendous political arguments, discussions, and playing football at the same time. But that's really, I think, all I can think of to tell you.

One more episode which stands out vividly in my memory is the morning that Eunice rang up and said Kick was dead, and would I go round. As far as I remember, Eunice, Pat [Patricia Kennedy Lawford] and Jack were there and there was a grim tragic restlessness about the atmosphere, with the gramophone playing, and a closing-in of the ranks of family and friends but no emotional collapse. There was a disciplinary fortitude about them and inborn courage.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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