Nancy Tuckerman & Pamela Turnure, Oral History Interview – 1964
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Biographical Note
Tuckerman was social secretary to Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy (1963). Turnure served as a receptionist and secretary in Senator John F. Kennedy's (JFK) office and later as press secretary to Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy. In this interview they discuss state visits and state dinners at the White House, Patrick Bouvier Kennedy's short life and death, and JFK's assassination and funeral, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

Nancy Tuckerman
and
Pamela Turnure

1964

By Mrs. Wayne Fredericks

For the John F. Kennedy Library

FREDERICKS: Nancy, I think we can begin at the beginning and the first question I am going to ask you is where you first knew Mrs. Kennedy [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] or how she had heard of you and when she offered you the fascinating job of being her social secretary?

TUCKERMAN: Well, I had know Mrs. Kennedy for many, many years—I guess since we were about eight or nine years old, and I had been to school with her in New York and then later on I roomed with her at Farmington in Connecticut. And I also kept up with her for the following years, and in February of 1963 she called me in New York and asked me if I would come down and be the social secretary and replace Tish Baldridge [Letitia Baldrige].

FREDERICKS: What were you doing in New York at the time ?

TUCKERMAN: Well, I was in the travel business which I have been in for about ten years. And although I had had no experience as a social secretary before, I decided to accept the challenge and I came down in April and trained with Tish for about two weeks. And she showed me how she ran state dinners and

compiled the lists and then at the end of May, or rather the first of June, I took over the job officially.

FREDERICKS: I see. Now was the job just the business of running the public functions or were there particular duties?

TUCKERMAN: No, there was a lot more entailed. There was answering of letters which came in every day requesting Mrs. Kennedy's chairmanship or tours to arrange at the White House or many visitors coming to see Mrs. Kennedy.

FREDERICKS: What was your volume of mail, would you say?

TUCKERMAN: I think we received about eight hundred letters a day. And most of them were answered in the social correspondence group. And the important letters came to our office.

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FREDERICKS: I see. Now was the social correspondence group under your direction?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, that and also all social entertainment, which made out all the invitations, but the social correspondence group had ten members and they opened and handled the routine mail.

FREDERICKS: And these were regular White House staff?

TUCKERMAN: Yes.

FREDERICKS: People who were in your office really or under your direction?

TUCKERMAN: That's right, and then our office was directly opposite theirs, and I had two secretaries in the outer office and then I had an office. And when I arrived all this sort of social…

FREDERICKS: The heavy social season was over, right?

TUCKERMAN: Most of the events. In other words, the spring, I suppose, was when most of the heads of state came. So we were entering into a quiet time when Mrs. Kennedy was going away with the children [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy; John F. Kennedy, Jr.] for the summer and there was no official state dinner planned until September 1, when the King and Queen of Afghanistan [Mohammad Zahir Shah; Homaira Shah] came. And that was the first one that I was involved in.

FREDERICKS: And wasn't Mrs. Kennedy expecting a baby so, therefore, she had no

more public appearances?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, I think she cancelled them around the first of March, before I came. However, she decided on all the entertainment they had at the White House. And when the King and Queen of Afghanistan came Mrs. Kennedy decided it would be appropriate to have a military review on the South Lawn of the White House. And then she decided something even more spectacular had to be done—because there had already been a military performance before. So she thought of fireworks, which they had never had at the White House, and the President [John F. Kennedy], I remember, was very dubious and a little bit nervous about this because he thought it might be too much of an extravaganza and too much of a display to suddenly have fireworks bursting forth.

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FREDERICKS: Well, was he overruled on this or did he think about it?

TUCKERMAN: He thought about it a great deal. In fact, he thought about it so much that he called me constantly to find out if the fireworks came from Japan; how long they would last; and many other things: whether by law in Washington you could set them off other than the 4th of July—but we found out it was legal. He had a hundred questions which I had never thought about—and had no answers for—but found out. However, to describe that dinner should really come later. After the summer.

FREDERICKS: But did you find that the President was intensely interested?

TUCKERMAN: Extremely interested, and I think he was especially interested in that state dinner because he had enjoyed the Marine Band and the military review on the White House lawn once before. I think he was pleased to have a change from some kind of highbrow entertainment in the White House East Room. As a final original touch, Mrs. Kennedy decided to have the dinner outside in the Rose Garden, which had never been done before at the White House.

FREDERICKS: Lovely.

TUCKERMAN: So there was really quite a bit of interest in this one particular dinner.

FREDERICKS: Nancy, could you describe your first meeting with the President? Had you known him before?

TUCKERMAN: Not very well. I don’t think I had seen him since the wedding. Maybe once, that’s all. I am trying to remember when I first saw him at the White House. I believe it was before a luncheon in the State Dining Room and after I had been there about two or three days. As I remember, I was sitting in the

Ushers' office, which is near the State Dining Room and where I used to sit during the luncheon in case I was needed. And I think this was the first time I met the President when he came into the Ushers' office because he had heard I was there—to say hello on his way to lunch, which was quite a typical example of his friendliness and interest.

FREDERICKS: Was he accessible?

TUCKERMAN: Very much so—the door was always wide open and there wasn't any difficulty at all. He would often beckon you to come in—just to see how things were going.

FREDERICKS: What kind of problem would you bring him? What sort of thing in your job would take you to see the President of the United States?

TUCKERMAN: Well, for instance, he was always very interested in the lists of guests who were being invited to luncheons or dinners, so whenever there was a State Dinner—once the list was compiled, you would always take it to the President for approval. Other than that, there wouldn't be too much necessity except as far as the entertainment was concerned.

FREDERICKS: Who did he think should be on those lists? What was his interest? What kind of guests did he want? Who would you say? He always wanted a very diversified group, wouldn't you say?

TURNURE: Very much so, yes. I think he was always concerned that it not be overly weighted on one end as opposed to another. Often he would say, I think we should get some people from labor in, or loyal party supporters, or perhaps he had heard of someone who had a particular interest in the country. His knowledge was so great and he never forgot a name and he would often come up with some amazing suggestion.

FREDERICKS: These lists were compiled really from…

TUCKERMAN: The basic lists were submitted from the State Department of ones they thought would be particularly appropriate because of their connection with the country involved, and then it would be rounded out by the President, by Mrs. Kennedy, by…

FREDERICKS: And wouldn't they always have a certain number of congressmen…

TURNURE: And a certain number of senators and a certain number of reporters and a certain number of press people, and the President was often very

amusing about whether or not someone should be invited to a dinner, and I would go over with my list of additions of press, and many time he would say, “Yes, I think you should put so and so on, it might make them less irascible” or, “Why are you putting so and so on? I haven’t read one good thing lately that they’ve written.” I don’t think he ever held a grudge against anybody—he forgot things very quickly. If he was angered by anything, his sense of humor showed in discussing these lists.

FREDERICKS: Did he enjoy the parties? Sometimes state functions can be rather grim, and stiff and formal.

TUCKERMAN: I always thought he did. I always had the impression that generally speaking he enjoyed them very much.

TURNURE: He became very buoyant and he basically enjoyed meeting people and the whole atmosphere was very relaxed. There were times when you could see he wasn’t enjoying himself and he appeared distracted because he had a number of things on his mind. He was very good about putting things aside, or perhaps he felt he wasn’t feeling well.

FREDERICKS: I have always wondered who chooses the lady on his left. Obviously if there is a wife of the state visitor…

TUCKERMAN: It’s all done by Protocol.

FREDERICKS: But is there a Protocol formula? Can he not choose at least one dinner partner?

TUCKERMAN: No, the main table is always set by Protocol.

FREDERICKS: I see.

TUCKERMAN: They would have about twenty people at the head table, and the President would always have at his right the wife of the head of state and then opposite would be the head of state who had been invited, sitting beside Mrs. Kennedy, usually. At times they had round tables and Mrs. Kennedy might sit in the Blue Room, if it was very crowded. They could only seat comfortably approximately 130 in the State Dining Room. But one of the innovations was to introduce the use of round tables at state dinners but these, too, were seated by Protocol. They would take the ranking guests and make them hosts or hostesses at individual tables. Round tables really ensured a much livelier group, and much livelier conversation.

FREDERICKS: That’s true. I have been to one of each kind, and I think the round table is a far greater success especially for the visitors who come.

TUCKERMAN: So much easier. You can talk to more people, and you feel it is less tense and formal.

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FREDERICKS: And one may meet more interesting people as well. Did the President ever express any particular interest in any of his foreign visitors? Were there some people who impressed him and stimulated him?

TUCKERMAN: I think one of the visits he obviously enjoyed the most, because it was nostalgic, was that of Prime Minister Lemass [Sean F. Lemass] of Ireland. He came on October 15, and he was the last state visitor. Because of his association and love for Ireland, of course, he was extremely glad to see him. They had a party upstairs after dinner, and they played bagpipes and they sang lots of Irish songs and…

FREDERICKS: What do you mean, a party after dinner? Do you mean a group that lingered after the state dinner?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, that lingered. I think the President had a small group of friends upstairs in his apartment and they sang some Irish songs. And I remember how he wanted the bagpipers and they all dressed up in their costumes and they caused a real sensation. They were great, and he kept calling me up before and kept asking me what songs they were going to play for Lemass, and he kept asking, "Are you sure they'll have authentic Irish songs?" because a lot of them like "McNamara's Band" are not really Irish authentic songs. And he was terribly particular that the tartans—not tartans—but, what do they wear?

TURNURE: Kilts.

TUCKERMAN: Yes—kilts were authentic Irish. He always took a lot of trouble and care over these matters.

FREDERICKS: The trip to Ireland, I take it, was a great high point for him. Were you on that trip, Nancy?

TUCKERMAN: No, I wasn't.

FREDERICKS: No, it was Pam—that's right.

TURNURE: It, obviously, was a very sentimental trip, and one that had great meaning for him, and consequently when there was a return visit of

Prime Minister Lemass, the President really wished to ensure that everything about it be perfection. We have been talking about dinners at the end of the Kennedy Administration, and I think that in each one

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the President took particular care because Mrs. Kennedy was still recovering from the birth and death of their infant son, Patrick [Patrick Bouvier Kennedy], and he really filled in in many ways. He always had so much time for us, and in this case he even made more time to go over every last detail and make sure that everything went perfectly. And that lasted from the Afghanistan dinner through the Irish dinner.

FREDERICKS: You had Afghanistan and then you had Haile Selassie.

TUCKERMAN: Haile Selassie—and also at the Afghanistan dinner, I remember, he suddenly got nervous again over the fireworks and about the day before the dinner he started into exactly the same routine that we had been through a few months ago. He said, "Well, I've decided now we must cut the fireworks in half." So they went from ten minutes to five minutes, and the man who was setting off the fireworks didn't quite understand or else he decided to make it more spectacular by putting the same amount of dynamite into five minutes because we'd paid for it…

So suddenly when the fireworks went off it really was incredible. Do you remember? Oh, the noise! The switchboard in Washington, the police boards, everything was jammed up. People thought the end of the world had come. Because it was quite late after the military review—it must have been after midnight.

FREDERICKS: Yes.

TUCKERMAN: And suddenly people looked out of their windows and saw not only a beautiful display of light, but all that bang, bang, bang of the fire crackers and they just thought that this was it. And they started calling—hundreds of calls—but this…

FREDERICKS: Was a great triumph! Or tie-up?

TUCKERMAN: Some Washington residents thought a plane had crashed and they just had all sorts of ideas, and a lot of them were frightfully irritated and some even wrote letters afterwards…

FREDERICKS: Oh, really?

TUCKERMAN: And complained.

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FREDERICKS: Now when that happened, was the President apprised of it, or did you tease him about it?

TUCKERMAN: He seemed to think it was wonderful, and I think he forgot that he had not wanted such a tremendous explosion. I was scared he wouldn't approve because there was such a powerful amount of dynamite set off. But he saw the obvious pleasure of the King and Queen and all the guests—and that was what really mattered.

FREDERICKS: Yes.

TURNURE: He was always quick to praise, and he talked about the dinner for weeks after. It was one of the ones he thought was the best.

FREDERICKS: When he has a good word to say does he send for you, or does he call?

TUCKERMAN: Well, I remember that night because it was my first state dinner. I was never so touched or happy ever in my life because the President called me up when he got upstairs. I was still in the White House, and I thought good heavens—you know—he's going to say she told me the fireworks would be so gentle and quiet, but he didn't. He just said, "Nancy, you've really staged an incredible first evening." I shall never forget that phone call. I had never heard nicer words in my life, especially since I had been quite nervous.

FREDERICKS: And the thoughtfulness to call you up.

TUCKERMAN: And he used to call other times, too, if something went well.

FREDERICKS: Did he?

TUCKERMAN: To thank you. Didn't you find that to be true, Pam?

TURNURE: Always quick to call, yes.

FREDERICKS: Well, what if something doesn't go well?

TUCKERMAN: Well, the next dinner which was for Haile Selassie unfortunately didn't go very well because of the entertainment.

FREDERICKS: What was the matter?

TUCKERMAN: Well, it was a ballet and it just wasn't appropriate for Haile Selassie. There were lots of girls dancing around—what would you call it?

TURNURE: Well, it was really a modern jazz ballet—sort of a history of vaudeville, so consequently there were everything from flappers in it all the way through to…

TUCKERMAN: It just wasn't quite appropriate for a man who was a religious leader as well as a head of state, and…

FREDERICKS: Another generation and another culture.

TUCKERMAN: Right. And we had not realized what the ballet would be like. It was an involved production, and they could not rehearse it for us in advance; on the actual day of the event, Mrs. Kennedy was leaving to go away with her sister [Lee Bouvier Radziwill] to Greece for a few weeks' vacation. She did come to the dress rehearsal just before she left the White House.

FREDERICKS: For the dress rehearsal?

TUCKERMAN: In the late afternoon, with the dinner scheduled to start at eight, it was felt the performance would not be appropriate—endless changes would have to be made, and we had to go and rent new costumes at the last moment.

FREDERICKS: The day of the dinner?

TURNURE: About five o'clock that afternoon. I remember the first place they called was closed—it was after 5:30, and they decided that the men should perhaps be in black tie and that would make their costumes more appropriate, and we had to get new leotards to cover up the girls' bare legs and arms, and it was incredible scurrying around to get this done. But they did shorten it and tighten it up. We felt it was much better and would be appropriate, but the President never did. He never liked it, and I can't really blame him because it's impossible to change something at the last minute. The dancers didn't get upset over it. How can you change things around and give a good performance in front of the President of the United States when you

haven't really rehearsed, but they did. We thought it was so much better because we were so relieved at least that everybody was properly clad! But it wasn't appropriate, and he was quite upset by it. However, he made one or two comments but then after that he dropped it and he would never bear a grudge or wear anything into the ground. And he was always gracious. Even though he personally did not enjoy the performance he twice met with the performers afterwards. Once in a reception room where they gathered and once immediately after the performance he went back stage to tell them what a wonderful young group they were. And he meant it in all sincerity. And he made sure that Haile Selassie and his

granddaughter [Ruth Desta] acting as his hostess met them. He was always gracious and always thoughtful of other peoples' feelings.

FREDERICKS: Yes, he knew the dancers were giving their best, whether it was suitable or not.

TUCKERMAN: That's right. It was really more our fault because we weren't able to check the performance out. I mean, they could have had anything else in their repertoire and it would have been suitable, but we had no opportunity to see a rehearsal.

FREDERICKS: I recall at the time of the Emperor's visit, he was very deeply touched and mentioned it to other people afterwards that Mrs. Kennedy had come to the railway station to meet him although she was still in mourning for the death of her son and although her own personal schedule was very tight that day.

TUCKERMAN: Yes, it meant a great deal to him.

FREDERICKS: Was this the kind of gesture that Mrs. Kennedy was sensitive to? Did she realize what it would mean or had the President and she decided that this was a protocol…

TURNURE: Well, I think they probably discussed it together, and the fact that she couldn't be there for the dinner and was leaving that day to go on a trip might have been a little bit awkward, and that she should go and greet him before she left Washington. And I know she feels now so glad that she had a chance to see him even for a moment. First of all, young John took the greatest fancy to Haile Selassie. I think one reason was because he was a rather diminutive man; he wasn't a great towering man, and then his marvelous uniform and his marvelous beard, and they became very, very fast friends. He loved the medals. And as a result

of this Mrs. Kennedy was particularly touched when he came back for the funeral, and of all the people who came and among the ones she wanted to see the most was Haile Selasse. And in the church during the funeral John got to a point where he started to squirm for a bit and Mrs. Kennedy was trying to point out various people who were there to keep him quiet, saying who they were, and she said, "There's Haile Selassie" and he said, "Oh, there's my friend, I must go see him." At that point they decided that it would be best if John waited outside, but I mean, it was the instant reaction that there was his friend and there was nothing to do but to get right up and go see him. And I think it provided a moment for her that was a little bit lighter than she had had.

TUCKERMAN: Yes, and she'll always remember it, and I am sure he will too.

FREDERICKS: I think the Emperor is quite famous for his genuine love of children, and many people in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia have commented on how lovely he's been about letting very small, noisy, children in his palace.

TUCKERMAN: Yes, that was the last—no, then came the Prime Minister Lemass. His was the last state dinner we had.

FREDERICKS: You mentioned their going upstairs and singing. Does the President himself like to sing?

TUCKERMAN: I don't know really whether he...

TURNURE: I would say that Irish songs, and I think that this is probably again influenced by growing up in a large family—they enjoyed group things and then his pals in the White House like Dave Powers [David F. Powers] and all the Irish—there was a marvelous camaraderie of the Irish and what could have been more appropriate than this night after the state dinner that old friends and Irishmen were together, and the grand singing of the not-so-authentic Irish songs—the Boston Irish songs.

FREDERICKS: There were a few other things I wanted to ask about the President in happy moments of camaraderie. Who were the friends who provided the relief and gaiety that really must be necessary in a job like this? You mentioned Dave Powers.

TUCKERMAN: I would have said he was a person who had so many friends from so many different…

TURNURE: And it would be divided up. I think that Mrs. Kennedy provided a whole new—not a whole new group of friends for him—but a whole again new set of interests which were relaxing for him. I mean he was as fascinated talking to somebody like, I don't know, a noted choreographer, a noted painter, a noted photographer about his work, and could get relaxation from that as well as talking to Dave Powers. I would say it was a very diversified group and a wide circle of friends. He never forgot his old friends and never close ones like Dave Powers, Congressman MacDonald [Torbert H. Macdonald], Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne Billings].

FREDERICKS: We are losing the names by speaking together—Dave Powers…

TURNURE: Congressman MacDonald, Lem Billings, Chuck Spalding [Charles Spalding], Bill Thompson, and then friends like the Bradlees

[Antoinette Pinchot Bradlee; Benjamin C. Bradlee] and the Bartletts [Charles Bartlett; Josephine Martha Buck Bartlett] and Bill Walton [William Walton]. There were so many that I think it would be awfully—you could list them forever, I would say.

FREDERICKS: Well, what were his opportunities to see the friends? Were there any evenings at home upstairs?

TUCKERMAN: They usually had people to dinner several times a week…

TURNURE: Quite regularly.

TUCKERMAN: Yes, very regularly. There might be only two other couples or there might be one couple. Mrs. Kennedy spent a great deal of time in the country so she wasn't in the White House but maybe four nights a week. She used to leave usually Thursday and come back Monday or Tuesday.

TURNURE: When she was in the White House I think she used to have dinners almost every night—a few people.

TUCKERMAN: When they weren't caught up in official engagements.

FREDERICKS: And then the new house…

TURNURE: They didn't go out very much, I remember that. They would much rather have people come to them. I suppose it was easier. They did in the beginning. They tried to go out and tried to continue the pattern of Georgetown life and the natural thing was to come back to a small dinner, but it was a difficult thing to do, and it got to be a strain.

FREDERICKS: And weren't the security wild at the thought of their going out so much?

TUCKERMAN: No. But I am sure it would never have entered into…

TURNURE: I don't think it would have mattered because they would just say we are going out somewhere for dinner, and they would pave the way in advance and check it out with the hosts where they were coming. I think it was primarily because he could stay in his office that long and have a chance to see the children and have a swim, which really was a necessary part of his day. Before dinner—see the children—and then they would give two or three private dinner dances each year—with, what would you say—sixty or seventy people, I guess?

TUCKERMAN: They never had them when I was there.

TURNURE: And then again they would get together—really the close, close friends, some Cabinet members, the Vice President [Lyndon B. Johnson], and they usually would have an orchestra to come down from New York.

FREDERICKS: I can remember seeing on Tish's list that Lester Lanin's orchestra had come on various occasions.

TUCKERMAN: Yes.

FREDERICKS: Good, dancey orchestra. But was the swimming pool used every day—therapeutically?

TURNURE: Yes, he always swam before lunch and before dinner.

FREDERICKS: Twice a day?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, twice a day.

FREDERICKS: Gosh! That's a lot.

TURNURE: Usually with Dave Powers at lunch time and then with the children if they were there—before dinner. It became great sport and a vital part of the day.

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FREDERICKS: How was his back during his time in the White House? Were there difficult periods?

TURNURE: Well, they are probably well known. The first setback he had was after the trip to Canada.

FREDERICKS: This was the tree planting?

TURNURE: Yes, the tree planting in May of 1961. He was in considerable pain all throughout the European trip, and then came back and finally had to really get off his feet and was on crutches for several weeks then.

TUCKERMAN: And I remember seeing him once getting on the helicopter on the ramp last summer. I think it was when he was going up to the Cape—noticing that from the way he was walking he was probably in pain. Definitely there was some problem, but they seemed to be able to correct it quite quickly, as I remember.

FREDERICKS: Was Dr. Travell [Janet G. Travell] in the White House, or on call? I have never understood quite how that…

TURNURE: On call—offices in the White House. But I believe after the big setback he began trying another way of correcting the problem with the back exercises. Actually I really don't know that much about it, but he seemed to have setbacks, and I imagined it was linked to overdoing and doing too much. There was a period when he started playing golf again last summer and then after several days it seemed as though he had to stop playing and he was having trouble again.

FREDERICKS: There are a hundred things that come to mind—but when he was in pain, were there any noticeable manifestations—was he Spartan and stoic in this or…?

TURNURE: Yes, and I would say a little bit shorter than he normally would be with people, but it was really difficult to notice it because he never complained ever. Just occasionally you would get a few little signs—something that you knew normally wouldn't have riled him suddenly just did, and he would be very short and very abrupt about it. I really didn't actually see that much of him, but we noticed that particularly.

FREDERICKS: Did he have an Irish temper as well as an Irish…?

TURNURE: I wouldn't have thought that he was a man who had much of a temper. Well, that's funny because I would say that he had a well-controlled nature but if there was something, it was very quick to surface and then this was over with right away and forgotten.

FREDERICKS: What would be an example of that, Pam?

TURNURE: Goodness—it's always difficult to remember specific things but—it's so hard when you suddenly have to.

FREDERICKS: Nancy, you were saying that when on occasion you had a guest list you would go down to the West Wing to the President's office. Was he easy to see, or did you have to make elaborate telephone appointments?

TUCKERMAN: No, he was always extremely easy to see. First of all, I would call Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln] and ask if he was there. She would either say, "Well, he's attending a meeting or he's talking to Mr. O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell]. Come down in half-an-hour and you probably can

see him." Then I would go down in half-an-hour and walk into her office, and usually the door was open between his office and her's, and he would even see you as you walked in, and he very often just called to you, "Come on in," And then he'd ask if you had any problems or, "What are you here for?" He wouldn't even know that you wanted to see him.

TURNURE: Many times, if it was a beautiful day and he had a moment between appointments, the door to his office was always opened to the rose garden, and he might be looking out to see if the children were there, and on several occasions when I would be rushing over before a briefing to release something through Pierre, he would call out, "Oh, have you got something for me?" You couldn't very well say, "Mr. President, I don't, and I'm in a hurry," so he would always stroll out and say, "What have you got there?" And I would hastily say, "It is something for Pierre [Pierre E.G. Salinger]"—"It's my release"—"Oh, I'd like to see it," he'd say. And he would read the release, and say, "Are you really going to put this out today?" and I would say, "Yes." Or he would ask some other question about it, and it was just marvelous his interest in everything that was going on and in everybody. Yes, he really cared tremendously that everybody was happy and that they were enjoying their jobs, and if they had any problem he really genuinely wanted you to come to him. So you always walked by there, and you felt this feeling of warmth and that you could walk in any time whatsoever.

FREDERICKS: Well, then you had no hesitation about bearding the lion about William Elder's bus load or three bus loads of whatever it was of visitors?

TUCKERMAN: Not at all. That was the time when they were having a tour and tea for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Bill Elder told me there were about twelve hundred people coming and he hoped very much that the President might be able to come and say a few words to them when they arrived on the South Lawn. He felt a little shy about asking the President, so he wanted to know if I would speak to him. I went to the President's office around eleven o'clock in the morning; the group was arriving about 4:00 p.m., and asked him if he would do this. And he said, "Of course I will," without any hesitation. But he wanted to know a little about the group that was coming. So he said, "I'll call you up and tell you when to come down for a little resume." But he didn't call and he didn't call, and the time was getting shorter and shorter, so I finally went down and got Bill Elder because he knew more about the National Trust than I did, and we went to his office and he said, "Come in and tell me about this group." By that time they were all congregated, and I thought it was going to take him about an hour and a half to prepare this speech, and Bill Elder told him a few things about Blair House and Decatur House, and I remember he walked around the office about three times continually clicking his fingers. I don't know whether this was usual—did he do that at times?

TURNURE: It was a habit—like tapping his finger on his teeth was another habit when he was concentrating on something.

TUCKERMAN: Well, I had never seen him do this, and Bill Elder hadn't given much information. In fact, I thought, "What will he say to these people?" and without saying, "I'm ready," or, "Let's go," he made three circles and then tore out of the office, and we followed behind him. He didn't say, "I'm ready to go now"—he just went at this tearing pace through the ground floor and out the diplomatic reception room. He got up on the platform and spoke for about ten minutes as if he was an authority on the National Trust.

TURNURE: But it was the most stirring speech. I have forgotten the quote, but he even found from his vast store of quotations a terribly appropriate one about a palace being built upon the shining sands.[1]

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The audience was completely undone by this because they felt he obviously spent several days preparing for this visit, and it was a marvelous speech, and I think he got more Republican support at a ten-minute interval.

TUCKERMAN: I remember he said to me, "Why is this group so important?" It rather amused me because I wasn't sure except I said, "Well, there are so many of them and for certain reasons." But he said, "they are all Republicans," and I said, "Well, maybe they'll all vote for you next time." You know, after this speech. And he said, "Do you want to make a bet on that?" or words to that effect. I guess he realized that one ten-minute speech in front of that Republican group was not going to change their minds that easily.

FREDERICKS: But it might have helped.

TUCKERMAN: Yes.

TURNURE: I think that is what appealed to him.

FREDERICKS: Was he a man of quick motion and—you say he strolled out of the room and walked around snapping his fingers concentrating…

TUCKERMAN: I thought he was—very much so.

TURNURE: He never sat still in a chair. He was always in motion really. With his quick mind—everything was in motion. He could be talking to someone and you knew he was thinking of a thousand different things; or he could concentrate on one person while turning to the next person and asking them

[1] Edna St. Vincent Millay—"Safe upon the solid rock, the ugly houses stand—Come and see my shining palace, built upon the sand."

something completely different. He was a very vital person, intensely involved in life and everything that goes on.

FREDERICKS: He could store information, in other words, and keep it there.

TUCKERMAN: And quick to decide things. He never mulled over things. In three minutes he was ready, and that's how he was.

FREDERICKS: Did he ever brood? Did you ever sense moodiness?

TURNURE: I can't say I ever really did. Certainly he was a reflective person, yet when he made up his mind about something and there was—going back to his Irish temper—whatever it was, once it had been decided then he proceeded on to the next thing. There were a number of instances where I felt it was my duty to say what my judgment was on

something, and it would end up that the final person to discuss it with would be the President. One such case was after the birth and death of Patrick. It was a very difficult time for Mrs. Kennedy and everyone was concerned with her wellbeing and quick return to good health, and she had been up on the Cape for a while and then had gone to Newport, but it was felt that she should get away for a trip. It was decided that she would go on a trip with her sister, Lee, to the Greek Isles on a boat. And I had felt that perhaps even thought it might be good for her to get away, it was not the best choice to go out of the country at this time and I felt obliged to say this to the President. And I talked to some other people, and I talked to Nancy about her and to Kenny O'Donnell, and they thought it should be rediscussed before the plans were definitely decided upon. Nancy and I made an appointment to see Kenny O'Donnell, and he was…

TUCKERMAN: And Pierre Salinger.

TURNURE: And Pierre Salinger, that's right—before we put out this announcement about the trip so as to have one more time to go through it to make sure that everybody concurred. And we went in to see Kenny, and waited—he was very tied up with a lot of things, so finally Nancy and I decided we ought to go back to the office. I had something to drop off at Evelyn Lincoln's office, and I said, "I'll just stop in for a minute and leave this off with Evelyn." And the door was open as usual, and the President looked up and said, "Pam, do you have something for me?" and I just decided at that moment to take the bull by the horns. I might as well say what I felt about this right now, and at that point Pierre and Kenny had come in from the other side of the President's office. They were both there when the President called me in and I made my little speech about what I felt about this, and the President looked up and said, "Well, I think it will be good for Jackie, and that's what counts. I think it will be beneficial for her." I still felt I should say something more, and the men were beginning to chime in. They had been

holding back all along and hadn't discussed this, and they said, "You know, you have an election year coming up, and it may not look right to have this sort of trip." But he said, "We will cross that bridge when we come to it, and that's final. I want her to go on the trip. It will be good for her, and she has been looking forward to it." And that was that. That was the way he was—I mean—and it never was discussed again.

TUCKERMAN: I think that is a very good example, because I feel he was very quick to accept things that had to be even if they weren't going exactly the way everyone would have like them to go.

FREDERICKS: Or even as he would have liked them to go.

TURNURE: Or maybe he would have had to have some questions asked and answered later on about this trip, but he felt the most important thing to him was his wife's wellbeing and return to good health, and therefore he felt capable of coping with whatever the consequences might be.

FREDERICKS: First things first.

TUCKERMAN: Right.

FREDERICKS: And decisions made. The death of Patrick Kennedy was one of the most—well it was tragic, of course, but I am speaking of it from the point of view of international press. I think that the press, of course, must have been extremely painful for the Kennedys to endure, but I think that behind the screaming headlines you had a real indication of the press that they had won in the every day affections of a worldwide group of people—I mean the loss of a baby anywhere is a tragedy—but when it becomes an international tragedy, it is a very touching tribute although a painful one, I think, to what they had achieved on their visits. Could you discuss a little the family at this time and the President at this time?

TURNURE: Well, I think one of the things that comes to my mind about this particular period of the birth and death of Patrick is that up to then even though there had been quite a few candid pictures of the Kennedy family together and some idea of what they were like as a family, that basically they had a marvelous reserve and they never wanted to sort of flaunt themselves as a family and show their innermost feelings for one another. When this happened, for the first time the inner life of the family became terribly open to the world, and what the President particularly and Mrs. Kennedy particularly felt for one another became apparent to the world, and this was something that people who admired them as a head of state and his wife, had really never known what they were like as a family until this moment. Suddenly it was all in the open, and the President's real devotion to Mrs. Kennedy and to the children—all if it—was a new side that had never been seen so microscopically before. This

doesn't quite answer your question but part of…

FREDERICKS: No, I really didn't ask a question, I was simply requesting on this. Did you see the cover on *Paris Match* after the death of the baby?

TURNURE: Yes.

FREDERICKS: I always regretted that that photograph of the President never appeared in the United States or at least I was never aware of it.

TUCKERMAN: I never saw that.

FREDERICKS: But on his face, in great dignity, was the whole story.

TURNURE: And no one had ever seen this side of him as a family man. They had seen pictures of him greeting the children, but for the first time they saw what this family felt for one another and how even more drawn together they were by this tragedy. I mean it was a very, very sad time and a great burden for the President, for he was the one really who, in some small way, got to know this baby before it died, while Mrs. Kennedy had given birth and was obviously…

TUCKERMAN: He saw to the whole part of taking the baby to Boston and…

FREDERICKS: He flew up, didn't he?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, and he sat, I think for one whole night in this chamber that they placed the baby in—by the baby—he sat there with the baby until he died, I believe, or until they knew it was absolutely hopeless. And then he—well what an emotional time to go through anyway—suddenly to be called on the phone and told she was going to the hospital—and at that moment really not knowing whether her life was in danger—the trip up—you know, he was very—I remember going up on the plane—he was…

FREDERICKS: Did you go too, Pam?

TURNURE: Yes, and he was very withdrawn at that time. He just kept sitting and staring out of the window, and obviously his thoughts were completely with her, and it was a very quiet trip—getting there as soon as possible—rushing to the hospital—and…

FREDERICKS: I am sure he realized that her life was in danger, too, because of past history.

TURNURE: I had seen that look once before. It was time again back to when John was born. I remember that look on his face when he got the word, "Come back." They had been through some terrible, terrible times together, and I think this was the first time the international public saw him as a President with family tragedy and…

FREDERICKS: And, of course, the inexorable demands of his job—things had to go on.

TURNURE: Yes, that's right.

FREDERICKS: How did this hit you? Did the strain…?

TURNURE: I can remember thinking that it was like living on a submarine because Nancy and I lived at the hospital with Mrs. Kennedy for the next several days. And we were completely sealed off from the rest of the world.

TUCKERMAN: Yes, completely sealed off.

TURNURE: And it was the most uncanny feeling because you would look out the window and you would see the press out there—the sun would be shining—and once we did sneak out the back door and go for a walk. We just had to get some air and get out, but everything sort of hinged upon his arrival and when he would come—that was the only really high point of the day, you know, the visits when he would come. And then the pace would pick up in this little hospital wing we were in. The rest of the time it was sitting and waiting, completely sealed off. I remember waiting for the papers to come in the morning, and every evening, just to see what was going on but it was…

TUCKERMAN: I remember thinking how terrible it was that they had no privacy even in the face of tragedy, because the press was—there were so many of them just standing outside the hospital door—like vultures, waiting for some kind of a message that we couldn't possibly open the door to go for a walk because they would just descend upon you.

FREDERICKS: I was always so shocked that the press was permitted to be there to take pictures of her as she came out of the hospital with the President—I thought that…

TURNURE: Well, that's part of American life though and then being the President of the United States and that—I don't think it could have been handled any other way. I suppose it could have, but this was the right way to do it and…

FREDERICKS: One more…

TURNURE: If she had said, "I cannot go through with it," then it would have been done some other way. But she said, "Yes, I can do it."

FREDERICKS: And she did.

TURNURE: And she did. But even through that period again his natural concern and warmth for other people, I think, always dominated his own self. He was the most selfless person I have ever known, and he was thinking about all of us then. He never complained about himself; he never talked about problems, and Nancy and I were there finally after the baby had died and things were setting into a pattern of just staying there and waiting until she was strong enough to leave. He came over to the hospital one day and saw us before lunch—he was going back to their house—and he said, "Won't you come over for lunch and for a swim?"

TUCKERMAN: We went there twice, I remember.

TURNURE: Yes, and he tried to give us a good time, and he never talked…

TUCKERMAN: And we had a jolly lunch, and we never discussed the baby at all.

TURNURE: Never at all. And Caroline and John were around, and it was a very—and Mr. and Mrs. Auchincloss [Hugh D. Auchincloss, Jr.; Janet Lee Auchincloss], and young Janet Auchincloss [Janet Auchincloss Rutherfurd] and Jamie Auchincloss [James Auchincloss], and he made it a very gay, carefree lunch, and it must have been difficult for him because he was still thinking about this, but here he was concerned again about other people and never showing what he felt himself.

FREDERICKS: And then Mrs. Kennedy, after this, went to Newport as I recall.

TUCKERMAN: She went to Hyannisport—well to their house in Hyannisport afterwards for about three weeks, I would say, and from there she went to Newport, for about a month, and during that time she was always available for little decisions about our famous Afghanistan dinner. You could always reach her and call her about it. She was still very interested. Right away she was very courageous through the whole thing, and life went on.

TURNURE: Yes. And she had the same qualities of never complaining herself and everyone wanted to bend over backwards to spare her things, but if you did have to ask her something, she always acted as though, you know, you could have asked me days ago about this and I would have been glad to help.

FREDERICKS: Of course, I gather from just reading with the rest of the world that the stroke that the President's father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] suffered was a great shock to the family, which had come, I believe, the prior winter, hadn't it?

TURNURE: It had come in December of 1961—actually two years before.

FREDERICKS: Two years before.

TURNURE: Because we had just come back from the trip to Colombia and Venezuela, and landed in Palm Beach to let Mrs. Kennedy off. It had been quite an exhausting trip and she was planning to bring the children down for Christmas anyway, so it was decided we would stop and she would get off the plane and go straight to the house in Palm Beach, and I think we were there for perhaps three hours and then took off again for Washington. We got back to Washington about noon time, and I think it was early afternoon when the word came that Ambassador Kennedy had had the stroke. The plane turned around and went back.

FREDERICKS: And went back.

TURNURE: I suppose, I don't know, there is so much that that family has been through that they were in some ways stronger than other people and geared to tragedy. Yet I think Mr. Kennedy, Sr., the Ambassador, had always been a person that something like this couldn't happen to. He was just the strongest, most vital man you ever saw and even though each of the children had their own very definite personalities, he was the marvelous person they all came to for advice about various things, and it was a great, great shock to suddenly see him incapacitated.

FREDERICKS: He was very much the head of the family then in that sense?

TURNURE: Yes.

FREDERICKS: Did he ever come to Washington to visit?

TURNURE: Yes, he did. For a long time he was very much behind the scenes. I think this was his own choice. During the campaign and then after the

election, of course, he was here for the Inauguration and from time to time he would pay a visit and they began in the most endearing way. He tried to stay behind the scenes; was so thoughtful of other people; and would always come over to call on the girls in the East Wing and would order ice cream and have it sent over to Tish Baldridge's office. And he would sit and eat ice cream with us—lots of jokes—and he was just a most marvelous man—and great personal warmth and somebody that you knew again—and I think this is where the President got this marvelous quality—if there was anything on your mind, you could call up Ambassador Kennedy and he would have a very good piece of advice to give you, and he was always available. In the beginning he used to call me, and when I would get home from the office around nine o'clock at night the phone would ring, and he would say, "I have read the *Journal American* and saw the story today on Jackie doing thus and so and I thought it was very good," or, "I didn't think it was very good," and it was so nice that he was interested.

FREDERICKS: He really cared then?

TURNURE: He really cared. And then after his stroke he came back to the White House several times, and I must say Mrs. Kennedy was so marvelous with him because she could be even more natural in a way than the President could be because I know it pained the President to see him as he became after his stroke. I can remember in October '62, I was about to leave on the advance trip for a state visit to Brazil, and Ambassador Kennedy had arrived that afternoon, and Mrs. Kennedy had taken the children out to the airport to meet grandpa, and the children never thought anything about it. It was fun to ride in his wheelchair, and it was still grandpa and they didn't really notice the change, and Mrs. Kennedy was marvelous about keeping the atmosphere relaxed. And I can remember going over to see the President about signing a letter that was very important to get off before the trip, and I said, "You know, I understand your father's here.

I would love to see him before I go," and he said, "Oh, I wish you would. Let me call up," and he picked up the phone and called to see where his father was, and he said, "Yes, he's in his room, why don't you go right over," and he seemed so relieved that somebody else would be going over as well to see him because he worried about his being lonely.

FREDERICKS: A very active man.

TURNURE: Yes. And yet—and I went over and I was about to go—and the door was open and he sort of went like this, waving his hand—sort of not to come in and I thought, "Oh, my heavens, I hope I haven't come at the wrong time, and the nurse turned and said, "Oh, he wants to get tidied up before you come in—straighten his tie and comb his hair," and here was also that marvelously dashing man who hadn't changed at all—and the blue eyes were twinkling, and while it was difficult for him to talk, he was following everything. So there was a great deal of Ambassador Kennedy,

I think, in his children and particularly in the President—a basic warmth and interest in people, and charm.

FREDERICKS: Was the Attorney General a frequent visitor at the White House, and the children? Was there a…

TUCKERMAN: When I was there they didn't come very much. They came if there was some kind of children's activity, but I don't believe they came…

FREDERICKS: He was more of an office visitor than a…

TURNURE: Yes, he obviously was very close in that respect, and they would come for the big private parties but I think, you know, he was a family man as well and that their life revolved around their home and their children so they weren't—and I would have gathered, although I didn't know that much about it, that the President did separate people he worked with all day—and saw other people at night—I suppose for relaxation, even if it was his own brother he still kept it…

FREDERICKS: They must have worked very closely on the whole Civil Rights problems which were building up a great head of steam, as I recall it during those years.

TUCKERMAN: But I don't remember seeing the Kennedy children around—the Robert Kennedy children, when I was there.

TURNURE: No.

FREDERICKS: How did the White House School go, and why was it started? Was there a reason for Caroline's not going to a nursery or a kindergarten outside the White House?

TURNURE: Well, it really was an outgrowth of the little school she had been in before, which was started by a group of mothers in Georgetown who recently got together as a playgroup at one another's homes alternating each week and Caroline was in that, and naturally after a year or so, was attached to these children. And all the parents were in the same predicament—of you know, "Do we continue with this school?" I suppose Caroline could have started out going to other parents' homes, but the ideal thing seemed to be to have it in one location and the White House had the facilities, and it really grew out of that. The first year it was a cooperative nursery school with mothers, and Mrs. Kennedy included, taking turns as teachers and helpers each week, and then the next year it became more formal and they got regular nursery school teachers and kindergarten teachers.

FREDERICKS: It was there—what—three years?

TURNURE: Well almost three years. But it wasn't created just because they were in the White House. It really was an outgrowth of something that had already existed.

FREDERICKS: Almost a continuation…

TURNURE: Yes. It went into two classes actually here.

FREDERICKS: I remember the charming pictures in *Look* Magazine of the President with his son, and I want to ask a little about the freedom with which the children were allowed to move about the White House.

TUCKERMAN: Oh, I think they had complete freedom to move about as much as they wanted to. And during recess when Caroline had her school they used to always go into the President's office to get candy, and even when he was busy they would still run into Evelyn Lincoln's office and…

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TURNURE: They had freedom, I would say, with its boundaries because obviously the White House was a very busy place, and it was open to the public until twelve noon every day but Sunday and Monday, so the children were never seen in the public rooms around them—and their school followed set hours…

TUCKERMAN: Yes, that's true. I take it back—and they did have…

TURNURE: And I must say that in the mornings when I would be walking through from the East Wing to the West Wing the children would be coming down for recess and there they would be in their orderly line and everybody waiting, and once they got outdoors the line exploded into twenty children going in all directions—after the puppies or toward the jungle gym. But I think the Kennedy children, particularly living in the house, were seen much less than one would imagine that they would be. It really was an apartment sort of life for them, and they were either up in their own quarters or they would be around all over—who could tell where—but that was their own home. Otherwise they came down in the elevator and went out of doors. I never saw them any place else unless it was at the request that they be there by their mother or their father.

FREDERICKS: But their father's office was accessible to them at recess?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, that's right.

FREDERICKS: They never felt that he was away…

TURNURE: But there would be a signal. He would go out and whistle or clap his hands, and they would all come running and they knew they could go over then.

TUCKERMAN: Oh, they just didn't go every day? I thought that was sort of a ritual.

TURNURE: Well, it became that, but it was sort of a prearranged one that he would know that they would be impatient to come, and he would be impatient to have them, but I think…

TUCKERMAN: And he would give them candy…

TURNURE: Yes.

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TUCKERMAN: And they were allowed to run around his office, I gather, and have a wonderful time. It was a marvelous education for these children. They met so many world figures—perfectly fascinating…

TURNURE: And then their school life would be integrated into what was going on in the White House. If there was a visiting head of state and there was going to be a ceremony on the lawn, then part of the day's activities would be to watch from the balcony outside the schoolroom, and if there was a special event like astronaut Gordon Cooper coming to the White House to receive a medal, then all the children came downstairs after the ceremony and shook hands with the honored individual—very memorable moments.

FREDERICKS: A campaign year was coming up, and I well remember all of us reading in the newspapers that the Kennedys had decided to go to Texas for a campaign. Could you tell us a little about the plans and the talks for the trip?

TURNURE: Well, the main thing I know was that when I was just about to leave, the President had a commitment for some time to go to Texas, and I know that when Mrs. Kennedy came back she called several days later, upon her return, and said that she would be making the trip to Texas. And I don't know how she arrived at this decision, except that several days later I had a query from the *New York Times* about the fact that she was going on this trip—it was significant because it was the first domestic trip she had ever taken with the President, as President, and they wanted to know what it meant. And I called her and asked, "How shall I answer this question?" So I wasn't sure whether one should get into political statements so early in the game, and she said, "Well, yes, say I am going out with my husband on this trip and that it will be the first of many that I hope to make with him, and if they ask about campaigning, say yes that I plan

to campaign with him, and that I will do anything to help my husband be elected president again." And from there we proceeded with plans for the trip. She was very concerned about one aspect of it because she wanted, I think, to be with him—his helpmate—rather than be a predominant person in her own right, and by predominant I mean so many of the trips abroad the press was very interested in her wardrobe and who was in her entourage; when was her hair done. She was very much concerned about this trip not being played up this way, and that starting from her everything would be done to see that it was not. Normally my function

is, as press secretary, to answer questions of this kind, and for that reason she felt that perhaps I should not come on the trip to work specifically for her—that I would go to help Mac Kilduff [Malcolm M. Kilduff], the Assistant Press Secretary to the President, who would be making the trip as press secretary because Pierre Salinger was away, and that I would divide my duties between helping him and answering a few questions about her. Other than that, she planned only to take Mary Gallagher [Mary Barelli Gallagher], who served as her personal secretary, on the trip. She would not take a maid and certainly nobody to do her hair, and, Mary Gallagher could help her with her packing at the end of each stop and could help her with what needed to be done about getting dressed, and she would do her own hair. She told me when I asked her some questions about her wardrobe, that she planned to buy no new things for this trip—that she would take a couple of suits she had had in her wardrobe for two years and one short dress for cocktails and a day dress and a coat, and the whole thing was very, very simple.

FREDERICKS: In other words, she didn't want to repeat the Paris scene when the President rose and said, "I am the man who accompanied Jackie Kennedy to Paris."

TURNURE: No, I think she wanted to be the woman to accompany John Kennedy to Texas.

FREDERICKS: What about the plans for the motorcade and for the car, and for her accompanying him? Was this all laid out well ahead of time?

TURNURE: Well, actually no. I would say it was a particularly hectic trip. I understand, and I recall, that they did have some problems in organization between people in Washington and people in Texas, and I would say in my mind it was one of the trips that we had less to work with until we actually got there than any trip I have ever been on with them. I mean, it wasn't until the last minute that everyone knew the motorcade route and exactly what you….

I remember calling frantically over to the West Wing for about a week every single day saying, "Do you have any kind of a Texas schedule so I can say something about what Mrs. Kennedy will do with the President and what she will not do if it's too hectic?" And as I recall, it was only about two days before that we got any kind of a schedule on it. And then it was decided that she would make one speech

during the trip, possibly or probably in Spanish, to a Mexican-American group in Houston, and she asked me to work on that, and I went to work on it with Richard Goodwin [Richard N. Goodwin], writing something out and getting it translated for her to study going down on the plane. Other than that, the only details they really checked out were with Mrs. Johnson [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson] about the visit to the ranch. I did spend one morning meeting with her and Elizabeth Carpenter [Elizabeth S. Carpenter] going over the plans to stay at the ranch and what the Kennedys' likes and dislikes were as far as food was concerned—very simple, basic things to see to their comfort.

FREDERICKS: Who decided that the bubble top would be down in the motorcade? As I understand, it was a bubble top car, was it not?

TURNURE: The President decided that. He decided from the very beginning that he didn't want to be in a bubble top, and as a matter of fact, I had one conversation with him about it and he was concerned about Mrs. Kennedy—would it be taxing on her strength and would it—and really you know—if you go in a long motorcade obviously you are going to be windblown, and as she was doing her own hair, it would do so much damage to the hair that it would be a problem, and he wanted her to look her best. We did discuss it, and I suggested the bubble top and just immediately he said, "No, that's semi-satisfactory, if you're going out to see the people, then they should be able to see you," and so I don't think it was ever considered by him at any point. It was just considered shortening in some way and varying the speed, but if the weather was good he would always have been in an open car.

FREDERICKS: And so then you all took off—and I can remember seeing on TV the excellent speech that he gave—the breakfast speech.

TURNURE: That was the second morning.

FREDERICKS: The second morning—in Ft. Worth—and Mrs. Kennedy joined him at the breakfast table.

TUCKERMAN: I remember seeing that.

FREDERICKS: That's right. And then you talked about—Pam, you started to say something.

TURNURE: I was going to say—to go back to the beginning of the trip—starting off in San Antonio where they did motorcade from the Air Force

base to the Aerospace Medical Center, and he made a speech and went in to see some of the work they were doing in special pressurized chambers, and then back to the airport and on to Houston where they had a hotel suite, to rest up before going out to the Albert Thomas dinner, and they were to stop by for a reception of Mexican-American citizens of Houston, and that's where the President simply introduced Mrs. Kennedy and she made a very charming speech in Spanish, and then they went on to the Albert Thomas dinner, and then from there to the airport to Ft. Worth where they spent the night, and then it was the next morning that he spoke to the breakfast group, and then on to Dallas.

FREDERICKS: Was the President in high spirits on the trip? Did it seem to be shaping up well?

TURNURE: Yes, it was going very well. The crowds were marvelous every place they visited, and they really seemed to be enjoying themselves very much. I went up to the room in Houston before she came down to speak before the Mexican-American group, and they were having supper off trays in the room, and I was chatting with them for a moment; the Vice President walked in, and everybody seemed in a very buoyant mood, and the President asked me if I was having a good time on the trip—if I liked it—and I said, "Oh, yes, I'm having a wonderful time," and said how glad I was to be there—and so it seemed very relaxed and was going well.

Everybody had some qualms about Dallas because of Adlai Stevenson's [Adlai E. Stevenson] visit and the things that had happened recently, but I don't think anybody had any qualms of anything serious happening, but it was always the challenge—the next day we're going to Dallas and let's see if it's going as well here. And I can remember going in the motorcade and everyone saying, "Would you believe it, only the President could do this, imagine all the things they said about Dallas—there have never been crowds like this, and it was just fabulous—the reception—just marvelous.

FREDERICKS: Pam, I want to ask you about the turnout—not the turnout but you mentioned the Vice President and the plans to receive the Kennedys at the ranch, and I wondered if you had anything to say about the relationship—the personal relationship—between the Kennedys and the Johnsons prior to this time.

TURNURE: I really didn't see that much of the Kennedys with the Johnson, so I don't feel that I could discuss it at any length. The Kennedys always seemed to be very fond of the Johnsons, and I can recall seeing them at some of the small, private dinner dances which they had, and Mrs. Kennedy, I know, was very fond of the Vice President. He championed many of her efforts for the White House restoration, namely, to get the historic chandelier from the Senate Wing of the Capitol which she put in the Treaty Room at the White House. I think there was a nice relationship, but I just did not see enough of it to discuss it.

FREDERICKS: We've covered the description of the trip to Texas, and at this time we won't discuss the assassination but to return to the White House, Nancy, on that November day—could you tell us a little bit of the home front story? Where were you and when did you receive the word?

TUCKERMAN: Well, our office was primarily concerned with the arrangements for the state dinner for Chancellor Ludwig Erhard who was coming from Germany, and there was a dinner planned for Monday night. At about twelve noon I went to Sandy Fox's [Sanford L. Fox] office—he was head of the social entertainment—to seat the dinner, and there were approximately 120 people coming that night. Preparations always took about an hour or an hour and a half and we were almost finished but not quite—I think we had about ten people to place when one of the men in Mr. Fox's office came in and said, "Someone has shot the President," and we were just—well, needless to stay—stunned beyond realization—just stood there…

FREDERICKS: Do you remember who came in from the office?

TUCKERMAN: Well, his name was Russell Armintrent, and he was one of the workers for Sandy Fox.

FREDERICKS: I see.

TUCKERMAN: But he was a very calm type of person, so the way he said it—he just walked in and said it rather calmly—it seemed hard to believe that—that the shot had even hit the President. He didn't say anything except this one remark, "Someone has tried to shoot the President." I think that's the way he phrased it. So the one thing I wanted to do was to go back into my office, because we had a TV set

there and a radio—to find out how true the story was. So I went back there and everybody was terribly excited, and turned on the TV, and at that time there were no pictures, of course, but just the commentator saying, "Someone has shot the President;" so I thought the best way to get information was to go to Jerry Behn [Gerald A. Behn] who was the President's Secret Service man. He hadn't gone on this trip—so I went down to his office, and he was on the telephone to Dallas. I realized that I shouldn't be there at that particular point because they were discussing things which I knew were quite private. So I left and went back to the office—we still had the television on, and everybody became quite hysterical in this correspondence group that I discussed before, and they all came in and asked me what happened and they were crying. I told them they had to control themselves and to go back to their desks and sit there, and we would tell them when there was any news. While we were listening to the television, Tazewell Shepard [Tazewell T. Shepard, Jr.] who was the President's Naval Aide—he also had not gone on the trip—came by and he just walked into the office and said, "The President is dead," and then all I could think of actually was what had to be done. The first person I thought of—I suppose I thought of the children first—was

really her mother, because I knew her so well. So I called her up on the telephone, and she didn't know a thing, and I did the best I could. And then, of course, I thought of the children and telephoned Maud Shaw, and just said to her, "What are you doing?" because I thought you could tell by her reaction—instead of saying, "Have you heard the news?" and she said, "Well, I am sewing," I think she told me. I said, "Do you have the radio or television on?" and she said that Caroline was away with a friend and that John was asleep. So I didn't tell her the President was dead—I just said there had been a terrible accident in Dallas and that he was very badly hurt.

FREDERICKS: And what was her reaction to that?

TUCKERMAN: Well, naturally, she wanted more details. So I went downstairs and John's Secret Service man was there, and I think it was Anne Lincoln who was the housekeeper, said that he was very close to Maud Shaw. I think it was Bob Forster, I am not quite sure—and that it would be best if he broke the news to her, so he went upstairs apparently and told her. And from then on it was just simply….

A lot of friends of Mrs. Kennedy's called up. They all wanted to know if they could come over and do something, and I thought it was best if they didn't come because there wasn't anything to do except

for me to try to think of people to call and then her sister, Princess Radziwill, called from London and she had heard from someone that somebody had shot the President but she didn't know that he was dead. So I told her on the phone, and after that I was trying to think of somebody who might be—Mrs. Kennedy was supposed to come back to the White House—not go to the hospital. That was the original plan and I tried to think of someone who might come and play with the children and perhaps help me a bit and give me some kind of a line as to what to do. So I thought of the Benjamin Bradlees, because they were very close friends. So I called up Toni Bradlee and asked her if she would come over and she did—with her husband—and I asked her to come at five-thirty, because Mrs. Kennedy was due at six o'clock. We met in the Oval Room, which was the family's living room and played with the children, and Mr. West [J. Bernard West], who was the Head Usher, came up and said that she was going to the hospital directly from the airport. So then Mr. and Mrs. Auchincloss, her mother and stepfather, came over and they were very excited and nervous. I felt that it might be wise if we went with them to the hospital in order to talk to them until she arrived, and I wasn't sure how Mrs. Auchincloss might react when she saw her, and it might be easier to have someone else there because I didn't know who was coming to the hospital. So the Bradlees, the Auchinclosses and I got in the car and drove to the hospital, and arrived there first and sat and talked and waited for her to arrive.

FREDERICKS: And the Air Force One landed at—what? Six o'clock?

TUCKERMAN: About six o'clock, I think it was. When we were sitting up in the family sitting room, I remember all of the Cabinet members came to

the White House to go in the helicopter to the airport to meet her. I remember one sad thing and that was that John thought when he heard the helicopters that that was his father coming home and his mother, and I also remember sort of an eerie feeling by so many helicopters coming and going so quickly, because as one group left in a helicopter another one would come in and take more people to Andrews Air Force Base.

FREDERICKS: Were the children aware of their—something being wrong? Or were they told of their father's death?

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TUCKERMAN: No, they weren't aware of a thing. Caroline was a little bit suspicious because she had been brought back from the country without any particular reason.

FREDERICKS: I see.

TUCKERMAN: I remember we sat there, and John asked Mr. Bradlee if he would tell him a story. He told him a story, and then he said, "Chase me around the house"— and he chased him around the house. Then when the Auchinclosses arrived to sit with us, we still thought she was coming to the White House, their car took the children back to the Auchincloss house for supper, and they were to stay there until they were notified to come home to the White House. So I don't think they had any indication at all, except that Caroline obviously sensed something was wrong, because you couldn't help it—even at six years old. But she never asked any questions, and she had a friend with her—the girl that she was staying with—and I remember she played with her in her bedroom, and came in and asked questions about the helicopters, but I doubt if she had any possible indication.

FREDERICKS: And then Mrs. Kennedy came with the Attorney General to the hospital, as I recall.

TUCKERMAN: Yes, and the people that had been—well Pam Turnure and Evelyn Lincoln, and Mary Gallagher, Kenny O'Donnell, Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien], Dr. Walsh [John Walter Walsh], who she was very fond of—he was her obstetrician. I had called him because he had been very helpful to her during the time when Patrick died. I remember he was one of the first people I really thought of because I didn't know what kind of physical condition she would be in when she arrived, so I called him and said, "Couldn't you go out there?" (to Andrews). Of course, he went.

TURNURE: It was funny, because I had simultaneously probably thought of him in Dallas, and kept saying if only we could get a message back to Washington to have Dr. Walsh come out to the hospital and be there when she gets there. Both Nancy and I had been so impressed by him, and he had been the

one who had to tell her that the baby Patrick had died, and she had such trust and confidence in him that it was just amazing when I got there and saw that Dr. Walsh was there, and I thought, "How did he get here?" and Nancy had thought of him at the same time, and called him.

TUCKERMAN: So we sent a car to pick him up at his office and sent him right out to the Air Force Base. There was a group of about maybe thirty people there when Mrs. Kennedy arrived, and I think the Bradlees did help by coming because she talked with them for quite a while, and asked them to make some arrangements, and we had coffee and sandwiches.

FREDERICKS: At the hospital?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, in the suite at the hospital, and from then on it is just a long story of her wanting to make arrangements for the funeral

FREDERICKS: She took a very active part?

TURNURE: And even then she was thinking always of what arrangements should be made, and that was the first night she said, "I am going to walk behind the casket."

FREDERICKS: She said that in the hospital…

TURNURE: That night in the hospital, I know, she said it. That whatever procession there was, the one thing she wanted to do was to walk behind it, and considering the emotional state she was in, I mean, she was thinking of all sorts of details and other people, instead of waiting to be told by somebody what should be the next step, and they were not expecting to hear it from her, and yet she was already thinking about how it must be done and getting the message to William Walton and Mr. West, the chief usher, to find out how Lincoln's [Abraham Lincoln] funeral had been done, and what the decorations had been like and, you know—but Nancy can tell more details than I can. Her sense of history came through on this occasion, and she knew it had to be the most fitting possible funeral, and she sort of…

TUCKERMAN: She was very much in command of herself, aside from the shock. Obviously she was in a certain amount of shock, but she could operate and she could make sense, and she realized that she had to make certain decisions and she did them simply beautifully.

FREDERICKS: I mentioned earlier the picture of the President coming out of the hospital, on the cover of *Paris Match*, which told the whole story. The

picture of Mrs. Kennedy at the swearing-in of President Johnson in the plane where she was obviously stricken and in deep shock, yet there, functioning correctly, was again another picture that just told

worlds—one look at her face and you could see everything there and yet the occasion at which she is functioning—she is there and going on—carrying on—under absolutely indescribable emotional duress.

TURNURE: At the moment of the swearing-in, Mr. Johnson said that we must wait for Mrs. Kennedy, and I remembered thinking, "How can they ask her to do this?" and then there she was. They went back and she said, "I will be ready in a moment," and she did it.

FREDERICKS: I think that photograph caught all that it had cost her, all that had happened, and yet the fittingness that she should be there, and evidently, Nancy, as you suggested, she carried on in this same manner on arrival in Washington…

TUCKERMAN: I suggested?

FREDERICKS: You said that although obviously she was in a state of shock she carried on…

TUCKERMAN: Yes, she certainly did.

FREDERICKS: What happened in the White House? You must have been up all night long.

TUCKERMAN: Yes. Well then we went back to the White House, and William Walton was there with books he had gotten from the Library of Congress, showing how the room had looked at the time of Lincoln's funeral, and we spent a great deal of time putting up this black crepe paper around the mantle piece, and workmen were up with ladders putting it around the chandeliers, and they took a great deal of time—I imagine until about three in the morning. I waited until she came back—I mean everybody waited until she came back, and then she had a short service…

FREDERICKS: In the East Room?

TUCKERMAN: In the East Room—very short, maybe three minutes—a few prayers from the priest when she came in with the Attorney General and the rest of the family. And after that—it might have been later—it might even have been four-thirty, she went upstairs and then most of us, I believe, went home. You

probably went home, too, then—for maybe three hours—two or three hours. The house was going to

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be open the next morning. Actually, I went back to the office—we had all been working on the list and the time schedules for various people to come in to view the body; members of Congress, the White House staff; it was divided into various categories with various times for them to come in. The first thing in the morning it was the family and the friends, and there was to be a mass then.

TURNURE: I remember we set it up in the family dining room, thinking that would be the most intimate room and the easiest place to have the mass said, and then they could go into the East Room where the catafalque was, and then we'd have coffee in the State Dining Room. Mrs. Kennedy came down, and she took one look at the family dining room and said, "Oh, no, it must be in the East Room," and I remember we all pitched in—because they had set up for the mass, all the various things that they have, over a little serving table. So we all picked up various things: I had the candelabra and Sargent Shriver [R. Sargent Shriver, Jr.] had something else, and you had something, and people were moving the chairs, and all the family had arrived with their coats and wraps, and they were waiting in the State Dining Room to come in for the mass, and we were trying to set it up again in the East Room because she felt it should be…

TUCKERMAN: Well, actually, they were all seated in the family dining room, and then we gave the signal that everything was ready so that she'd come down and not have to wait, and she got down and saw that it was straight ahead of her in the family dining room, and she said, "Oh, no, I want it in the East Room," so, you know, you felt so badly that it hadn't been planned originally where she wanted it, although how would anybody know? So I said to her, "You go upstairs," and she had the children with her…

TURNURE: She did take them in first, though, while there was this momentary confusion. She took both the children by the hand into the East Room, and obviously explained to them—then I think she went upstairs, maybe, for a few minutes, or perhaps she didn't. But we had to pick up chairs and move the whole service, so there was a certain amount of confusion obviously. But I believe it was the only thing that didn't go completely smoothly during those three days, which was completely unavoidable, but I don't think there was one other detail that didn't go just like clockwork or—absolutely amazing in those next three days that there wasn't any confusion or—consider the logistics of it, particularly when it came time for the actual funeral—the moving in of hundreds of heads of state—that would be a book in itself really.

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But the key to it is her availability at this time when nobody wanted to go near her. They felt the one thing she must want is to be left alone, and she had asked Sargent Shriver to be the liaison to oversee all this, and yet when the time came for some important decision that only she could make, she was always available. I can remember feeling that I talked to her more in those three days that I probably talked in the last three years. If I didn't call her, she called me say, "Did you take care of such and such—is it all right—will we have it?" And then she decided on having the mass cards. She picked an excerpt from the Inaugural Address, then a little prayer which people had seen with his picture, and she chose the picture, and she wrote it all out by hand so that Sandy Fox, who had to take care of the printing of it, would know what to follow. She wrote herself these excerpts from the Inaugural Address, and just the saying which she thought of, "Dear God, please take care of your servant, John Fitzgerald Kennedy," and sent it down on a piece of paper from the White House—it was a memo pad and said "The White House," and then she'd written in the things from the Inaugural Address and drawn lines to show where the division should be, and she had time to do all these things. It was extraordinary and she always knew exactly what she wanted.

FREDERICKS: She did.

TUCKERMAN: We even had to think then of the printing of the sympathy cards. Although we wanted to wait a week or so—all of this had to be done so quickly, and she decided to have—well, Pam can tell you better—the crest…

TURNURE: With the Kennedy coat of arms. But it was sort of a ring that had been given to him in Ireland. It was a crest that the Irish Ambassador [Thomas J. Kiernan] had presented to him, I think in 1961, and it was the first time the Kennedy coat of arms had been rediscovered and drawn up again, and I think for a birthday she gave him a signet ring with the crest on it, and suddenly we couldn't find a copy of the crest any place, and she went and found the ring and sent it down so we could send it off to the engravers to be printed.

FREDERICKS: Had the Kennedy family come to the White House that night?

TURNURE: Yes, they did. They had been coming in from all directions. I remember getting telephone calls the next night—like Saturday—saying that Cousin Rose Ryan or Mary Ryan had arrived from Ireland, and she was sitting at the airport and what should she do, and there was a man from the PT boat. They had all gathered up enough funds to send him to the funeral. So there was an appalling number of details to contend with. Then the city was so crowded with people—where would you send them? And then the decision was made to wear morning clothes—striped pants for the men—you had to find places where they could be rented and—especially after hours—because this was on a weekend and people coming in on Saturday and Sunday; how to divide the church—family and friends—flowers—the Cabinet—I mean

it was the most endless—plus the fact that the house still had to function as a household, and many members of the family moved in. The Lawfords [Patricia Kennedy Lawford; Peter Lawford] moved in, and Robert Kennedy came to stay in the house, the Smiths [Jean Kennedy Smith; Stephen E. Smith], I believe, came to stay.

TUCKERMAN: Yes, they did.

TURNURE: So they had more people staying in the private quarters than ever before and obviously more needs in terms of refreshments for them, plus when the heads of state came and members of Congress and the family—there were different times when it was felt that something should be served—coffee or breakfast and all of this going on simultaneously.

FREDERICKS: What were the reactions of some of the White House staff—the chef, who was such a key figure in it all?

TURNURE: I actually don't remember the reactions of anybody because they all carried on their duties first before letting themselves go.

TUCKERMAN: Nobody collapsed and you never discussed anything—never said "Why are we doing this," or, "Who do you suppose shot the President?" or "Who is doing what job?" You just had so much to do that you never stopped to talk to anybody. At least that's the way I felt.

TURNURE: I got exactly the same impression. This was the busiest time that had ever been in the White House, and everybody knew what they had to do, and yet the only time you probably saw it—I remember the first mass which finally was set up in the East Room and Mrs. Kennedy, you know, asked that whatever servants wanted to come should come with the family and friends, and that was the first time

when I was standing between one of the doormen and a maid, and you knew what they felt but they had to leave the mass and then go in and serve at the breakfast afterwards, so they carried on in the most remarkable fashion. It couldn't have been done otherwise, really. When you think of details and…

FREDERICKS: Well, I take it that the staff felt a great personal attachment for him, and this was a real…

TURNURE: Oh, I think very definitely so, and he felt a great personal interest in them.

FREDERICKS: Did he?

TURNURE: He knew everyone by name—drivers—knew things about their families—his warmth and magnetism carried through always.

[Interruption]

FREDERICKS: We ended our last tape talking about servants in the White House coming to the mass for the President in the East Room and your mentioning how very visible their grief was at that time. I wonder if you could talk a little more about the servants in the White House and the relationship of the President with them.

TURNURE: Both the President and Mrs. Kennedy were simply very conscious of them as individuals and human beings, and it wasn't a question of going out of their way, they were just naturally interested in them, and I can remember being so impressed once being in that house with Mrs. Kennedy—quite early in the Administration—and I always thought of it as masses of people who were there to serve the President and his family, and they were rather anonymous to me. I can remember he was doing an interview about something, and it was rather hot under the lights, the television lights, and she turned to one of the butlers and said, "Wade, would you bring me a glass of water," and I was so impressed that she knew his name, because I thought it would take a year to learn everybody's name, and this was about a month after they had been in the White House, and the President was the same way about them. He rapidly learned everyone's name and something about their families, and I can remember he was a bit taken aback when they first went there, because I gather that the Eisenhowers [Dwight D. Eisenhower; Mamie Doud Eisenhower] were very military people and with a certain feeling that some people were there to serve in one capacity—you know, to be seen and not heard—and

one would walk through the ground floor corridor after the tourists had left and the house men would be vacuuming and as soon as somebody came through they would turn their faces to the wall and turn off the vacuum cleaners. It was the most peculiar thing, and the President commented on it and said, "What's wrong with all of them?"—that's the way it had been in the previous administration—that they were always to keep out of the way when anybody came through the house. He really made a point of getting to know each one individually, and it applied to the Secret Service as well. He was impressed by the number of the Secret Service, and he was a little bit upset for it was difficult to remember everyone's name, and once asked me if I would be sure to ask Jerry Behn who was head of the White House detail, to send him over some pictures with everyone's name underneath, so he could call them by their first name. He said, "After all, I spend so much time with these people, it would be terrible to be out for a walk and not know who it is," and so he was always very interested. They both were and I think, you know, it was a wonderful relationship both ways—it was respect and admiration for the Kennedys and concern and interest on their part.

FREDERICKS: How many servants were in the White House?

TURNURE: I think there was a total of about seventy people, if I recall correctly. But this included everyone, like butlers, gardeners, electricians, plumbers, painters, carpenters, maids…

FREDERICKS: The upkeep must have been tremendous.

TUCKERMAN: The only reaction I ever got to the servants was the White House drivers, who often told me when they would drive me home, how much they loved the President and Mrs. Kennedy. They felt it was so different—their relationship with the President than former presidents they might have worked with—and subsequently have told me the same thing—that he was so interested in their family and their life and never got short-tempered with them. I think they did have more of a close feeling toward the Kennedy family.

TURNURE: That's right, and when you stop to think that the majority of the servants in the White House had been there for a time spanning two or three administrations—that working for a president of the United States perhaps could become a job rather than a marvelous opportunity and a really incredible experience. And with the Kennedys,

it became working for a family and not just a figurehead and not somebody that you never thought you'd ever get to see or talk to.

FREDERICKS: It's interesting. I can remember particularly a poignant on the television screen, and then later in the papers, of a janitor or a mover or, I don't know, perhaps a ground man, moving on his dolly the President's rocking chair out of the White House in the rain, and even that seemed to be handled with a little consideration and as if this was something that meant something to him.

TURNURE: Yes.

FREDERICKS: And I can remember driving up to the White House in the rain to go into the East Room and seeing the dollies in the rain even that day coming across the courtyard, but each move being moved so quietly and with respect and sadness. You, yourselves, have moved across the cobblestones, so to speak, and have new offices now. Could you tell a little bit about this transition period and what you're working for now? What Mrs. Kennedy is currently doing? Start with Nancy.

TUCKERMAN: Well, immediately after the funeral—of course, the letters kept pouring in, and I believed we received 45,000 letters one day.

FREDERICKS: One day!

TUCKERMAN: One day…

FREDERICKS: Gracious!

TUCKERMAN: And it fluctuated for about a month between twenty to thirty or forty thousand each day. At that point we didn't know how to handle the whole situation. We also didn't know exactly when we would have to move from the White House, but Mrs. Kennedy did feel quite strongly that she should move as soon as possible. So on December 8 we actually moved into our new office. It was a Saturday, I believe, but before that we called on friends of hers who came in to read the mail and to put it in different categories, but it really wasn't until we moved into the Executive Office Building that we realized the tremendous task ahead and the volume of mail, wouldn't you say?

TURNURE: Actually, in the beginning all we could try to do was to separate what was VIP mail from regular mail and our limitations—the staff was such that we had to do it in the most obvious sort of way.

VIPs were almost only heads of state, or people we recognized as very, very close friends—and we could make some sort of separation so that Mrs. Kennedy would get a sampling of this sort of mail. We used to sit in Nancy's office and my office, and as many people as could be jammed in would sit on the floor around the coffee table and discuss rumors, sort the mail, and…

TUCKERMAN: Also, we had tried to sort of figure out when—she wanted all the heads of state and family and friends, of course, to get these acknowledgment cards, and when we tried to figure out how many should be printed, I remember Sandy Fox looked back in the files to President Roosevelt's [Franklin D. Roosevelt] death to find out how many acknowledgment cards Mrs. Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] had to send. But there was absolutely no indication that the volume would be as great as it was.

TURNURE: We were only talking in terms of hundreds of thousands or something—as an overall total.

TUCKERMAN: Mrs. Roosevelt sent out 75,000 cards, but when we found out it was during the war and because of paper shortage or something, she sent out cards or she made a speech announcing that she couldn't do it because of the paper shortage.

TURNURE: But even so, we had no indication that our mail would go over a million pieces…

TUCKERMAN: No.

TURNURE: No way to know it.

FREDERICKS: What was your final count on mail?

TUCKERMAN: Over a million, I don't know exactly.

TURNURE: Probably over a million.

TUCKERMAN: But Sandy Fox tried to help us figure out the amount, and he said, "Well when Patrick Kennedy died last August we sent out 35,000 acknowledgment cards then," so he just gave a rough estimate. He said, "Well, obviously it would be a great deal more."

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FREDERICKS: Well, Nancy, do you mean that 35,000 people roughly, unknown to the Kennedys, expressed sympathy at that time?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, at the time of the baby's death.

TURNURE: So we could only judge by that, and realized that it would be overwhelming in comparison, but he sort of figured we'd start off by ordering 150,000—you just couldn't tell.

TUCKERMAN: I doubt whether anybody could have predicted the volume which came in.

FREDERICKS: And what was the final count on the President's death, did you say?

TUCKERMAN: Well, we sent out 900,000 acknowledgments on March 17, and they're still coming in at the rate of about 600 letters a day—not all sympathy, of course, so I should judge not quite a million…

TURNURE: We're getting—it's around a million.

FREDERICKS: You mean still 600 letters a day come to your office—intended for Mrs. Kennedy?

TUCKERMAN: Yes, they're not all sympathy. Some are requests for pictures of the President; sympathy probably is very small at the moment.

TURNURE: I must say one of the important things in getting started again really

was moving. We had to carry on in our own offices. First of all, they were suddenly inadequate for what we had to do, because mail was coming in and it was being piled in the corridors. There was no place to process it. It was just being stacked in enormous cardboard cartons, one on top of another, from the floor to the ceiling—we'd look for a corner in the Naval Aide's office in our correspondence section—there was just no way to physically start working on what we had to do. Plus the fact that one was conscious that Mrs. Johnson would be coming into the White House soon, and that her staff would have to move in, so the big milestone, I think, in my mind was moving. I can remember how excited we were at the thought, in a way, of leaving our offices which were so crammed with this mail and going to brand new spanking clean offices—it was the whole idea of making a

fresh start. We moved on a Saturday morning, and Nancy and I went over to the new offices to take a look before we were finally about to do this, and I can remember wanting to burst into tears because we looked into what we thought would be a nice new supply room, and the mail room had already started stacking the mail in there, and it was the whole room—which measured, I don't know, ten by twelve or something—stacked from the floor to the ceiling with mail. You just felt, "How are we going to do it?" And then, I don't know, it happened.

Also, I remember we had a fair amount of space for three rooms. At that point we didn't even know what to do with the third room—four rooms they offered us. We just sort of felt that there were the two of us and we had plenty of space. Little did we know that we would have to take over Brookings Institute on Jackson Place to handle the fourth floor, so it just shows how ignorant we were of the situation. In the beginning you always think you can do everything, but it ended up that it took three thousand volunteers to answer the mail—and in the beginning we thought we could do it. We were discouraged, but when we decided "we can do it"—and then organization took over—you realized that…

TUCKERMAN: But it took about two men from the Attorney General's office who came every day, and we had meetings as to how to cope with this, what categories to put…

TURNURE: Just organization—not starting anything but just discussing which way—they made flow charts; we would have dry runs—all of these campaign terms; but we would go through—we'd take a sack of mail and we'd open it and we'd read it and we'd decide. We would say, "OK, this goes in the request category; this goes in the such and such," and we'd do a dress rehearsal just opening the mail and then we decided, "We now have ten basic categories. Now if we get twenty people in, how long will it take them to go through a sack of mail?" Then after we had the categories we had to decide what type of form letter would answer what, and if it hadn't been for these marvelous men, Dave Hackett [David L. Hackett] and Barney Ross [George H. Ross], from the Attorney General's office, I don't know if we could have started thinking about it in those terms, because they had very organized minds and were used to have to

decide. I think, in our hearts, we wanted to just sit down and answer every letter, but you just don't quite know how to do it until somebody shows you.

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TUCKERMAN: Also, it was the time just before Christmas, and the President had planned to give seventy-five books of Inaugural Addresses, which he had specially bound for Cabinet members and particular friends, and Mrs. Kennedy decided about a week before Christmas that she would like to inscribe—write inside each one—and then give them for Christmas. So we had that job of giving her the books with the names, getting them back, having them wrapped and having them delivered. And other things…

TURNURE: And other Christmas presents. She carried on all those things. One big difference was not to send the Christmas cards which, for the first time, she had been so pleased about them. She had sent me a memo saying, "For once we have been so well organized..." because last July before she went up to the Cape, or it was June even, she had made the final selection of the Christmas cards, and we were working on the printing and the cards were ready in August. That was one thing that she didn't go through with, but everything else she did—in terms of his Christmas presents and her Christmas presents, and that was a massive job to get them out.

TUCKERMAN: So it was really quite a month we spent—that first month—getting the thing organized and trying to do it in the easiest way and most efficient way. We even had an efficiency expert, I remember, from Boston come down from some company there, who knew how to organize offices. He came down with about three of his men and we had a meeting; he went back and wrote a very nice letter saying, "This is completely beyond me. We will do anything to help; this is our job; we are in business to make money." They wanted to come but they said, "We can't do a thing for you." "We wouldn't know how to start helping"—so it was right back in our laps again. So with the help of Dave Hackett and Barney Ross, who were on charts and dry runs, we got the thing organized. And now it works very well.

FREDERICKS: Well, that is simply astonishing. How is Mrs. Kennedy's mail handled now, if you have 600 letters a day?

TUCKERMAN: Exactly the same way. There's a group of volunteers who come in every morning, and they read the mail and put it in the categories, which are less categories than originally, and we don't answer the ones asking for photographs—we are not equipped to. But we are

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still trying to handle the rest of the mail. We have about five volunteers who pledged to come in through June and July on a daily basis, and they type and answer the phone.

TURNURE: We have sort of an action mail category—I'd say what—about a hundred letters a day that do get some response now out of the 600—say 100 are being answered.

FREDERICKS: Well, what kind of letter would Mrs. Kennedy herself see? What would you sort for her?

TUCKERMAN: Letters from friends or heads of state. Important letters we send to her.

TURNURE: Anything to do with the Kennedy Library, one project with which she is actively involved.

TUCKERMAN: She personally answers anybody who has sent a donation of over $1,000 to the Library, and then the heads of state come and she sees them, and there's the traveling library which starts in…

FREDERICKS: What is the traveling library?

TURNURE: It's going to be an exhibit which will go to twenty-five cities in the United States this summer, of things which some day will be in the Library—objects which were in the President's office—photographs, important papers such as the Test Ban Treaty, letters which he wrote to his father when he was in the Navy during the Second World War. It really will be a miniature Kennedy Library which will go to twenty-five cities to raise funds, but Mrs. Kennedy has been actively involved in this selection of items for the exhibit, the actual layout of the exhibit, the catalogue which will go with it.

FREDERICKS: Does she come to the office to do a great deal of this, or do you work with her in her home?

TURNURE: We work with her mostly on the phone and through folders, which we have always done with her. She is very well organized and very methodical, really, about her work and likes to do things. She is a good

memo writer, and she expresses herself very well in writing; so we mainly do this—she had been to the office a couple of times to meet the volunteers, to thank them and see what they were doing.

TURNURE: But the memo system is really excellent…

TUCKERMAN: Very—because we had a record of what she said or what you've asked her to do—we send a folder, a manila folder, each of us, to her every

day usually, and it stays there about a day and is then sent back to us; and—they're typewritten memos—then she writes the answer on the bottom. It works out terribly well because then you have it right in front of you—what should be done with this letter and all, and you're really filing only one piece of paper. It really is better than going out to the house and waiting to see her.

TURNURE: Oh, it's much more satisfactory, because we know that if the folder goes out in the morning, she probably will work on it in the evening and, in a way, I think a great deal more gets done that way than if you go out and see her and vice versa.

FREDERICKS: What about the plans for the President's grave? Are they of concern to her as well as the Library?

TURNURE: Yes. But really not through our office. She's working directly with John Warnecke [John Carl Warnecke], the architect, on that.

FREDERICKS: I see.

TUCKERMAN: There isn't actually as much administrative work to be done on that as on the Kennedy Library.

FREDERICKS: What is the date and what is the timetable for the Library now?

TUCKERMAN: I think they hope to have it started in a year—the groundbreaking.

FREDERICKS: Has an architect been picked for it?

TURNURE: No, they've asked six distinguished American architects to submit plans and then the family will meet to decide which of the plans

they prefer. But they have had a series of meetings—several at Mrs. Kennedy's house; a major one in Boston with a committee of eighteen architects from all over the world to decide what plan they would follow, and the decision they arrived at recently was to invite six people to submit designs.

FREDERICKS: Six American architects rather than…

TURNURE: Yes, that's right.

FREDERICKS: And Mrs. Kennedy has gone to these meetings and organized them? Then the body of your work is the planning of the Library as well as coping with these incredible…

TURNURE: Well, the various details which concerned her, I would say. We really act as liaison for her in a lot of these matters.

FREDERICKS: I see.

TUCKERMAN: But neither of us are involved in any way in deciding about something to do with the content of the Library.

FREDERICKS: Did the President ever express any wishes or plans which she is trying to carry out as regards the Library?

TURNURE: Yes, he was very keenly interested in the idea of a presidential library, and I think this was the place he planned to retire and make his headquarters after being in Washington, so he personally picked out the site.

FREDERICKS: Did he have any definite idea of things he wanted in it—was that something he was…

TUCKERMAN: He might have talked to her privately about it, but I don't think we have any knowledge of it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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