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JFK: The Education of a President

Nigel Hamilton

What goes into the making of a president? To what extent are the mind and character of the American commander in chief determined by his background, his family — and his education? This article represents a transcript of two lectures Nigel Hamilton presented in the spring and fall of 1989 at the Massachusetts State Archives. They were derived from the preliminary sketches for the author's full-scale biography of John F. Kennedy, to be published by Houghton Mifflin in 1992 on the anniversary of the birth of the thirty-fifth president.

Many are called, but few are chosen." That is without a doubt a good description of how hard it is to get into heaven. But I've often thought it an apt reference to the White House.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was, after all, only the thirty-fifth man in almost three hundred years to reach the Oval Office — in the twentieth century, between the election of President William McKinley in November 1896 and Kennedy's own election in 1960, only nine men occupied the White House!

I suppose a statistician could give us an interesting assessment of the odds against John F. Kennedy's becoming President Kennedy when he was born; but if we think that between the election of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932 and Kennedy's own election almost three decades later there were but *two* other presidents, we have some idea of this veritable "eye of the needle" through which he passed.

Given these odds, is it not therefore of intrinsic interest to know more about the formative years in the lives of those men who *have* reached the top — to know, in the case of John F. Kennedy, more about his family background and the schooling he received — his first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh schooling, first, second, third, fourth college . . .

It's remarkable how much a man can go to school — or how many schools he actually attends in the course of his education — and Jack Kennedy was no exception. Not too

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much attention has been paid in the past to Kennedy's schooling, yet this was the man who would become the youngest elected president in American history, and the first Catholic to achieve that office!

Forgive me then if, as a foreigner, I explore with you a period in John F. Kennedy's life which, when seen from afar, amounts to no less than the education of a president. To my mind it is worth investigating for that reason alone. If it's a story that's well known to you, I can only apologize. If it's not, I hope I can share with you some of the fascination I've found in my biographical research.

First, let's be clear about dates. That John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born in the front bedroom at 83 Beals Street, Brookline, at 3:00 P.M., following unseasonably stormy weather, on May 29, 1917, is undisputed. That his father was employed in important war work at the time, as he and his wife, Rose, later claimed, is not true.

On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson had asked Congress for approval of his intention to declare war on Germany. Four days later, the Senate and the House of Representatives having given their assent, the president had signed the official declaration.

In courting the support of Congress, after Germany's own declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare on any vessel approaching Great Britain or the Entente Allies in the Mediterranean, President Wilson noted what a fearful thing it was

to lead this great peaceful people into war, the most terrible of all wars. But the right is more precious than the peace, and we shall fight for the things that we have always carried nearest our hearts — for democracy . . . for the rights and liberties of small nations, for a universal dominion of right by such a concert of free people as shall bring peace and safety to all nations and make the world at last free. To such a task we can dedicate our lives and our fortunes, everything that we are and everything that we have, with the pride of those who know that the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principles that gave her birth. . . . God helping her, she can do no other.

Six senators and fifty congressmen objected. And in Boston, the country's youngest bank president — albeit of a small Boston-Irish bank — also objected, at least to the spilling of his own blood, the dedicating of his life, or the risking of his fortune.

The truth was that Joseph Patrick Kennedy, though a bank president in title, had no fortune. His personal wealth in 1917 is listed in the Brookline tax directory as a paltry \$1,050. His house, worth \$6,500, had been bought three years earlier on a \$4,500 mortgage, with a \$2,000 deposit loaned by members of his family. Joe Kennedy had no intention of following his country's colors with his fellow Harvard classmates, class of 1912, or fellow Boston Latin School alumni, and he never did join up. Like ten million fellow Americans, he had to register for the draft on May 18, 1917, but his number was not selected in the first draw nor did he enlist. He was twenty-eight years old and had sworn he would be a millionaire by thirty. Fighting for the country that had given refuge and succor to his grandfather half a century earlier was obviously not going to bring his first million any closer. Although he was in effect only the manager of a single, small deposit bank, the Columbia Trust Company, and his work could easily have been — and was subsequently — taken on by his aging deputy, Mr. Wellington, he decided to stick out the war in his Boston bank.

This turned out, in the spring and summer of 1917, to be harder than he'd anticipated. His father-in-law was John Fitzgerald, the ex-mayor of Boston, the city's greatest rooter and publicist, friend of presidents, three times a U.S. congressman, and constantly in the

limelight — indeed, he had challenged Henry Cabot Lodge for the Senate in 1916, and in 1918 actually won back his old seat in Congress, to return for a fourth inning. It was therefore impossible for Fitzgerald's son-in-law, young Joe Kennedy, to avoid some of the reflected political and public glare. Amid much publicity, Mayor Fitzgerald's son joined up; people began to gossip, even to shun the "yellow" couple from Beals Street. Finally, seven months after America's entry into World War I, Joe Kennedy made his move. He still rejected the idea of a uniform but managed to get himself a job in a Boston shipyard by the Fore River. Within days he was almost sacked for causing a strike that brought the entire shipyard to a standstill and sent alarm bells ringing in Washington, so that the assistant secretary of the navy, young Franklin Roosevelt, had to take charge of the dispute. Kennedy was removed from his post as yard deputy and given a back-room job in charge of stores and the canteen. But it was enough to avoid call-up when the Boston draft board attempted to classify him Grade One Eligible for military service after Christmas 1917. Kennedy thus remained at the Fore River yard until the war was safely over, then abandoned shipbuilding as quickly as he had entered it. His eyes were firmly fixed on making his first million, and the war had been but a postponement of that aim.

I mention this because it was against this personal and national background that John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born. People didn't like his father, and if truth be told, his father didn't like people. Even Joe's wife left him after the birth of their next child, returning to him only at the urging of her father, the mayor, who feared the scandal that separation or divorce in a Catholic family would cause in Boston.

If Joe Kennedy was disliked, and his elder son, Joe Junior, was considered a somewhat aggressive chip off the old block, the apple of his father's eye, then Jack, as he was quickly nicknamed, determined to be *different*. Wanting to be liked, he learned very quickly how to achieve his goal. He had a high IQ — possibly the highest IQ of any American president — but brains don't attract people, so he largely concealed them. Instead he cultivated a sense of humor, largely at his own expense, which captivated people. He was always falling ill, yet was so plucky, never feeling sorry for himself, that he was popular among adults and contemporaries alike.

He had survived a near fatal bout of scarlet fever in 1920 — causing his father to offer half his fortune to the church if God would spare the boy — so school posed little difficulty for such a talented child. He'd long since astonished his parents by his questions, his curiosity, and his sayings. Hospitalization and illness had encouraged him to read early, though not always the sorts of books his mother liked. She later recalled one book that she "wouldn't have allowed in the house except that my mother had given it to him. It seemed very poorly illustrated, with the pictures in brash, flamboyant colors."

Jack liked it very much, and the travels of its protagonist, Billy Whiskers, intrigued him. When he asked his mother where the Sandwich Islands were, she thought he was joking, but looked them up in an atlas and found they were real. Even Jack's father remembered being thus wrongfooted by the infant, though he got the name of the islands muddled. "I remember when he was a little bit of a shaver, before he ever went to school, trying to find out where the Canary Islands were, because he had read something about them in a Billy Whiskers book. Me, I had never heard of the Canary Islands at the time."

Tales of King Arthur, Arabian nights, the jungle stories, all became favorite reading, sparking his imagination and wit. He told his mother, who was becoming ever more religious, that he did not "care much about wishing for a happy death, but that he would like to wish for two dogs." "Gee, *you're* a great mother to go away and leave your children all alone," he said at age four when she left the family for nearly three months.

Jack Kennedy had already been sent to the kindergarten of the nearby Edward Devotion School on Harvard Street in April 1921, when he was still three. The kindergarten, together with a primary room for the first two grades, had been built and opened thirty years before, when it was said to acquire a reputation “which attracted people from far and near to see what many regarded as the perfection of infant training.”

The school, named after a patriotic local Brookline citizen who left a sum of money to the town in the eighteenth century, in 1913 had been extended to make eight classrooms and an assembly hall. Despite his young age, Jack did very well, though without exerting himself more than he needed. “You know, I am getting on all right and if you study too much, you’re liable to go crazy,” he told his mother. He was still only five, and fiercely competitive with his brother in anything athletic. Mrs. Kennedy, his mother, was already having difficulty with her daughter Rosemary, a year younger than Jack, for Rosemary, a slow learner, was in fact suffering from undiagnosed mental retardation. Mrs. Kennedy had also given birth to two more daughters, Kathleen and Eunice, in 1920 and 1921, and was expecting Pat in 1924. She had neither the time nor the energy to look after her boys, and to some extent they began to “run amok” in the neighborhood, being found on a neighbor’s garage roof, getting into fights, and in one famous bicycle clash, involving Jack in a twenty-seven-stitch accident with his brother.

It was time, Mrs. Kennedy felt, for firmer supervision. So with Joe Senior well on the way to his first million dollars on the stock market by manipulating shares to his own personal advantage, Joe Junior was transferred to Noble and Greenough, a nondenominational private boys’ school on Freeman Street in Brookline. Most of the children were of good Massachusetts Yankee stock, and when Joe Junior entered in 1924, his was the only overtly Irish name.

Mrs. Kennedy would have preferred a Catholic school, but her own father and husband had been sent to the famous nondenominational Boston Latin School, across the harbor from East Boston, where père Kennedy owned a series of saloons. Despite having to repeat his final year at school, Joe had somehow managed to go on to Harvard, a feat that was still unusual for Boston Irish boys in the early years of this century — and would have been impossible had he attended a Catholic school. Since then the prejudice against Irish Catholics had not really altered — in fact, Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy were rejected for membership of the Cohasset Golf Club, in the town where they spent each summer, in 1922. It was obvious that being the daughter of a controversial Democratic Party mayor of Boston and son of an East End Boston-Irish tavernkeeper was still an impediment to social progress in the 1920s. A Roman Catholic education for his children would only make matters worse, Mr. Kennedy argued — and got his way so far as his sons were concerned.

That Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy did not see eye to eye over the matter is illustrated by the confusion that surrounded Jack’s schooling in the fall of 1924. At the end of the summer term in June, the Edward Devotion School had marked “withdrawn to attend Noble & Greenough School” on Joe Junior’s attendance and promotion card. On September 11, 1924, Jack was entered as starting grade three at Edward Devotion, under Joe’s old teacher, Miss G.H. Manter. Meanwhile, however, Noble and Greenough Lower School published its new calendar and school list, noting Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. as one of the twenty-one pupils in class C — and John F. Kennedy as one of the twelve in class D!

Did Joe Kennedy take both boys to be interviewed by the principal of the Lower School, Miss Myra Fiske, in the spring of 1924? In his history of the school, Richard Flood quotes a letter written by Miss Fiske to the headmaster of the whole school on April 3, 1924:

Dear Mr. Wiggins,

I am very glad that we decided to take this little John Kennedy. He is a fine chap.

Aged only six and already completing second grade, he no doubt was. Did Mrs. Kennedy want to separate the two boys, as she tried to do later? Truth to tell, we don't know, but term began at Noble and Greenough Lower School on Monday, September 29, 1924, and only on October 22, three weeks later, did the Edward Devotion School note on its record card that John F. Kennedy had been withdrawn to attend Noble and Greenough. Joe Junior and Jack were together again.

For Jack Kennedy it meant marking time, since he was placed in class D, equivalent to grade two. But if he thought life at this new private school was going to be easy, he was very much mistaken, for he had come under the aegis of one of the great primary educators in Boston history, the legendary Miss Fiske. If a certain lawlessness prevailed on the corner of Abbotsford and Naples roads, in the house Joseph Kennedy Senior had bought for his wife in 1921 — and where he had made his first somewhat discreditable but so far not illegal million dollars and was being sucked into the teeming world of motion pictures — it certainly did not exist in the classrooms of Noble and Greenough Lower School. The buildings were old and unimposing, but the education, entirely conducted by women, was considered to be first class.

Given Jack Kennedy's later problems with male teachers, and accusations by feminists that he never really took women seriously as intellectual equals, or was uncomfortable when in the presence of "blue stockings," it is interesting to note how well he responded to female teaching at this early age.

One of the boys who attended the school at that time remembered that it was

a very friendly place. The interesting thing to me was that there were no men teaching at all, all women teachers, and they were very, very strict. And I dare say it's a lot like the English system as I picture it — very strong on multiplication tables, very strong on grammar, very drill, drill, drill, all the time. The only man when we started out was the so-called athletic instructor. He was a veteran of World War I, who had been both shocked and gassed. I'd never seen anyone like that. He was a complete nut and as a result, for the first years, there was no real athletic supervision. We just kind of ran loose in the afternoon.

In a sense, this was to be the pattern of Jack Kennedy's early life — a strict and in many ways excellent training of the mind, on a quasi-British system of education, but with great freedom outside the classroom, where he became a natural and passionate ballplayer.

I think it fair to say that this reflected a split in Jack Kennedy's own character, and that a great deal of this division stemmed from his parents. Given that this discourse is about John F. Kennedy, I cannot enter deeply into that relationship, nor do I wish to pass judgment. However, it is plain that Jack Kennedy internalized much of the tension and emotional hostility in evidence at home. His elder brother, Joe, apparently did not.

Again one of his schoolmates recorded that Rose Kennedy never accompanied the boys to school; in fact, she was rarely, if ever, seen there. The boys, he remembered, were delivered in a shiny black car by a chauffeur. The only evidence of their mother was in the unique school uniform the Kennedy boys wore.

The interesting thing I remember was the uniform. All the boys had to wear was a red jersey and knickers — nobody wore long trousers in those days — and long stockings.

And Rose Kennedy, his mother, I guess felt that the sweater wasn't enough protection for him in the cold weather, so she knitted onto both her boys' sweaters a hood, and they were the only boys in the school who had this hood.

If she could not give her children the warmth they craved, Mrs. Kennedy intended at least to make sure they were warmly dressed. She certainly took no risks with their health, removing the children from school if there was an outbreak of the flu. Later, when they were at prep school, she would write more letters to the matron and headmaster's wife about her children's diet and health than any other parent in the history of the school. However, her ardent religiosity — she attended mass every morning — her frequent trips away from home (often for months at a time), and her still growing family left the boys very much to fend for themselves emotionally. In a school where to be Boston-Irish Catholic as well as the son of a banker-stockbroker with a bad reputation and grandson of a Democratic politician with an even more controversial reputation, this was not easy. Joe Junior reacted very differently from Jack.

Joe, the older brother, was as different from Jack as day from night. He had all the bad Irish traits I can think of. He was very, very pugnacious, very irritable, very combative, and I can remember at recess — we had a very long recess — he would challenge older boys to fight.

Jack, by contrast, refused to brawl. Instead, he took bets on his brother — in marbles. The picture of a future president avoiding fisticuffs but quietly betting on his older brother's chances of victory is, I think, somehow a very symbolic one.

One might ask what part Kennedy's father played in his son's education at this time, and the answer is: an interesting one. In 1924 — the year Jack entered Noble and Greenough — Joe Kennedy went to New York and personally fought off a pool of operators attempting to put the Yellow Taxi Company out of business on the stock exchange. He even missed the birth of his daughter Pat as a result. In November he loaned his new Rolls-Royce to the left-wing Progressive candidate for the presidency, Robert La Follette — a move so strange that La Follette later considered it to have been part of a conspiracy to make him, as a Progressive, look ridiculous in the public eye.

Joe Kennedy, like his wife, was certainly an enigma: first absent, then involved in a surprising way. Late in 1924 he personally came to the rescue of his sons' school, for the main school, which in 1920 had moved from Boston to Dedham, had decided to sell its property at Freeman Street to a developer. The lower school, catering to sixty-five pupils and losing money, was to be closed down altogether.

Even in her nineties, Miss Fiske remembered the moment when she, like the children's parents, heard the news.

The trustees had a meeting on a Sunday. There was a terrible snowstorm and we all made our way as best we could to the school building.

Well, you know, Mr. Wiggins didn't announce he would sell. In order to keep the school going in Dedham, he had to put up another school building — and he couldn't afford it.

Dear Mr. Wiggins — we all admired him. But that did something to people, selling off the lower school.

He came over with Mrs. Wiggins and everybody was there to protest — you never saw anything like it.

Mr. Wiggins asked what was the trouble.

I said, "Mr. Wiggins, why didn't you notify anybody?"

He said they were notified.

I said, "In what way?"

And then I knew he was beginning to lose his mind, which he did later.

"Why, I told so-and-so — one of my good old families — to notify people."

"Well," I said, "you can't notify a school that way, that you're closing it down!"

It is a mark of the respect in which Miss Fiske was held by the parents that they immediately banded together to buy the school buildings back from the developer, provided that Miss Fiske would agree to be the principal of the school to be called Dexter School after the family that had built the property. A committee of ten trustees, including Joseph P. Kennedy, was quickly formed, and for \$165,000 the school was not only bought back, but set up as a non-profit-making corporation with Miss Fiske as principal and all her staff reemployed as teachers.

The new Dexter School opened on January 29, 1926. "The aim of the school is to teach the boy how to study, how to acquire the habit of the greatest possible effort in his work, how best to develop the habits of honesty, courage, perseverance, self-reliance and control — in short, how to express by his own earnest effort the ideals taught him in the school room and on the field," its first prospectus declared.

Miss Fiske later elaborated on this. Her task as she saw it was "to teach a boy how to study, to help a boy develop to the limit of his capacity. Once he has acquired the right habits of study, he will go on on his own momentum. And as he gains facility with the tools of learning and develops mental skills, he will be surprised at what he can accomplish."

There was assembly every morning on the second floor, something no boy who attended Dexter School in those days would ever forget. Miss Fiske, one pupil later recalled,

played the piano well and we'd have assembly in the morning and we learned to recite in unison, the whole school: things like Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, his second inaugural address, pieces from English literature . . . we learned them and we recited them. We sat there and we'd say a line and then we'd add another line until we knew it . . . I mean, I can recite the Gettysburg Address like it was I'd just read it this morning.

Nor were the other women teachers less demanding — or less awesome. One, Miss Dow, became famous among the children for knocking a boy out cold when he was misbehaving — "she wasn't a great physical brute or anything; actually she was a small woman, stocky. She cuffed him from behind when he was fooling — his chin caught the desk and out he went like a light! There wasn't much fooling *after that!*"

"The classes were small, and we knew each other so well," Miss Fiske remembered before her death at ninety-nine. "I loved the boys. Discipline was never a problem to me — it never worried me at all, particularly when I had a bigger school." One teacher she sacked for being "too cold." "How did I keep discipline?" she asked rhetorically. "I simply feel the thing, I feel it. I felt it so keenly that they, the children, felt it!" Love, she said, "doesn't that take care of a lot? And you know, they're twice as smart as you!"

With boys like Bill and McGeorge Bundy in her school, this was doubtless the case, as with her pet, Jack Kennedy, who to impress Miss Fiske offered to get his father to loan his Rolls-Royce if Miss Fiske would take him to the nearby historic sights at Lexington and Concord.

I don't think Rose came along, Miss Fiske recalled. "All the boys came out to see the famous Rolls-Royce. And when it came it was a dilapidated old Ford! Jack never got over how the other boys hooted him — something had happened to the Rolls-Royce!"

However much Miss Fiske might love her charges and however seriously she took her job as an educator — insisting on six grades at the school — she could not overcome snobbery and elitism in a school that drew its children from the oldest and richest Yankees of Massachusetts. Although Jack Kennedy's father had been a founding trustee of the school, the Kennedys, as Boston-Irish Catholics, were still considered a race apart. "Almost everybody was a Protestant," one colleague recalled. "There may have been a few other Catholics, no Jews at all. I think there was a sort of snobbery, which the children adopted. I think that in those days the upper-crust Boston family, of which there were a great many sending their children to Dexter, were very down on the Irish. I mean, these were the days of Mayor James Michael Curley, who was later imprisoned for corruption. The Irish were blamed, I think wrongly, for everything that went wrong with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. To be an Irish Catholic was a real, real stigma — and I'm sure that when other boys got mad at the Kennedys, they would resort to calling them Irish or Catholic."

Whether Mrs. Kennedy kept away from Dexter because of this prejudice we don't know, but we do know that she "never, never appeared" on the scene. Nor was Mr. Kennedy liked. "My father would have nothing to do with him," one of Jack's colleagues recalled of Joe Senior. "A lot of the parents wouldn't even speak to him because he was so disliked. The view was: Mr. Kennedy had made his money in ways that were known, in banking circles, to be unsavory; Mrs. Kennedy's father, 'Honey' Fitzgerald, was a scallywag if ever there was one, and everybody put these two things together and they said, 'This couple's up to no good.'"

Speaking sixty years later, this classmate admitted that these were the attitudes of "very narrow-minded people. But these were the sort who sent their sons to Dexter — Leverett Saltonstall amongst them. They had nothing to do with the Kennedys at all, and I'm sure the boys, they must have had a hard time. Their sisters were never going to be invited to the debutante parties — the Kennedy daughters never, never would have been invited to any of those things — nor would Joe or Jack get invited to them, because the feeling was so strong — I'm embarrassed to tell you this, but it is the truth of the matter."

The boys did their best, both in class and at sports — traditionally the manner in which social prejudice can best be overcome at school. Sport was the means used by their father at Boston Latin and at Harvard, as by Rose Kennedy's father at Boston Latin and later, as mayor, when he became a great supporter of Boston's baseball and football teams.

Mrs. Kennedy was inclined to accept the prejudices with the stoicism and resignation of her religion. But Mr. Kennedy was not very religious, and the promotion of his ever-increasing band of children would become, in a sense, his life's work. Certainly it appears to have been what kept his frail marriage together, a marriage that would soon be sorely tested, once more, when Joseph Kennedy took up with Gloria Swanson the following year.

But for the moment in 1926, as the Dexter School survived its first year of independence, Mr. Kennedy had reason both for satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In 1925 he'd bid a million dollars for the British film company FBO, but failed; in 1926 he was successful. The Boston stocks-and-shares shark would become a movie mogul.

Invited to Jack's tenth birthday party in May 1927, a classmate remembers with awe the treat in store at 51 Abbotsford Road: a cine projector in the living room, a screen, and a

genuine movie show of westerns, at home. But not even home movies would get the boys or the girls invited to the Boston balls.

For some time, in fact, Joseph Kennedy had wanted to move away from Boston. However, his wife was loath to leave her comfortable Brookline house, her parents, her relatives, and her Irish friends. Nothing Joe Kennedy could say would persuade her, and when the fall list of the Dexter School went to press in the summer of 1927, both Joe Junior and John Kennedy were included, in classes five and six, respectively, along with the Blakes, the Bundys, the Morgan Butlers, the Gardiners, Hobbses, Jacksons, Peabody Lorings, Appletons, Barstows, Brewers, Hoopers, Huntingtons, Nowells, Storrows, and Clement Titcombs.

Once again, however, Mrs. Kennedy changed her mind at the last moment. An epidemic of poliomyelitis broke out in Massachusetts, and the beginning of the fall term at Dexter was postponed till October. Fearful for her children's health, Mrs. Kennedy caved in. Her husband's secretary and assistant, Edward Moore — who had been secretary to her father when he was mayor of Boston — was dispatched to New York to rent a house. He found one in Riverdale, north of Manhattan, close to an excellent boys' private day school, the Riverdale Country School. Renting his own railway carriage, Mr. Kennedy ferried his wife, children, and belongings from the stuffy provincialism of New England to the heart of the American financial empire, New York. He'd bought a house at Hyannis Port on Cape Cod for the summers, so the Massachusetts connection would not be entirely broken.

Jack Kennedy's Boston education had ended. Miss Fiske was sorry to see the boy go. He was bright, alert, witty, charming, an achiever in the classroom and on the sports field, well mannered, and rarely in trouble.

II

Riverdale, New York, in 1927, was very different from Brookline. Liberated from the social prejudices of New England, Joe Junior began to flourish at Riverdale Country School. Joe Senior seems to have become liberated, too: several weeks after the family's move to New York, he met the sex goddess of Hollywood, Gloria Swanson, in the Renaissance Room of the new Savoy Plaza Hotel, became her business manager, and by Christmas, when she joined him in Palm Beach, her lover. Loaning her money from his old Boston bank, the Columbia Trust Company, and putting his accountant from Fore River days, E. B. Derr, in charge of her finances, Kennedy became to Swanson what William Randolph Hearst was to Marion Davies. But, Swanson afterward related, when Kennedy asked Boston's Cardinal O'Connell for help in getting his marriage to Rose annulled, the cardinal refused.

For Rose the move to Riverdale was certainly traumatic. "For months I would wake up in our new home in New York and feel a terrible sense of loss," she later confessed. That and Joe's simultaneous passion for Swanson, ten years his junior, came "like a blow in the stomach," she recalled — a literal truth in that her stomach was once again swollen, this time with her eighth child, Jean. While Joe cavorted with Swanson in Palm Beach, Rose traveled to Boston to be within easy distance of her faithful obstetrician, Dr. Goode.

Joe's *grande affaire* and Rose's reaction would have a profound effect on their offspring. There had always been tension; now there was a form of undeclared war, Rose venting her unhappiness in a mixture of fanatical piety and expensive trips abroad in

which she sought to make her husband “pay” for his infidelity by buying some of the most expensive designer dresses then being made. As she had once been consort to her father in his greatest days as mayor, so she now determined not to be a downtrodden mother, but an elegant wife whom her ambitious husband could discard only at his peril. She thus allowed Swanson into her home, and traveled with her to Europe for the launch of Swanson’s latest movie, *The Trespasser*, in the spring of 1929. By the fall of 1929 Rose had won; the stock market collapsed and Joe Kennedy, whose father had died the previous year, lost heart in speculation. It was time to consolidate, maritally and financially.

What effect did such marriage strains have upon the children? Increasingly, Joe Junior became a miniature paterfamilias — responsible, purposeful, ambitious, and brooking no back talk — whereas Jack, age ten in 1927, retreated, like his mother, into an emotional shell, disguising his dislocation by a sort of manic dependence on “chums” whom he could seduce, so to speak, by his charm and bravura. Like his mother, he would in a sense never recover from the move away from Boston. A strange, disturbed restlessness entered his life, a homelessness. Home, from this time on and for the rest of his tragic life, would be determined by a relentless urge to be “where the action is”: a challenging of the territorial boundaries, the frontiers of new places, new people. His widow, at the urging of Robert McNamara, would have him buried in Arlington. But his emotional home, like his mother’s, was among the Irish Catholics of Boston, and the only tears he’d ever weep would be in Ireland, the font of his Irishness.

In Brookline, Jack Kennedy had used his cleverness and wit to overcome the prejudices of his peers. In Riverdale, however, there was no prejudice, only the alien atmosphere of a new home, new school, and the tribulations of his parents. He began to leave his clothes behind him wherever he went. Rootless, he would now succumb to a lifetime of life-threatening illnesses, yet fight for survival like one demented. His father was and would remain a man of violent contradictions, at once mean and generous, selfish and selfless, ambitious yet able to rein himself back, heartless yet openhearted. But beneath the many layers (or accretions) of culture that his son Jack Kennedy adopted, there was a much more complex, contradictory, wild, even manic personality than historians and biographers have generally perceived. His father’s contradictions became well known: a blunt, coarse, partly evil, partly noble man who would go down in history with Neville Chamberlain, his friend, as the archdeacon of appeasement. By contrast, Jack Kennedy’s superficial, seductive grace concealed a troubled spirit, a deeper, more restless, discontented individual determined to be always himself, yet uncertain where he was going. It is this quality, of course, that makes his life journey so moving, and its turning points and steppingstones — from his flagrant wartime love affair with a suspected enemy agent at the time of Pearl Harbor to his final love affair with the sister of one of his best friends in Washington, from his apotheosis as a Pacific war hero to his leadership of the free world at age forty-three — so humanly interesting.

In Brookline, it was the elder brother who was aggressive and unsettled. In Riverdale, it was the elder brother who settled and, in the late summer of 1929, was sent to his first boarding school, an Episcopalian establishment barely three decades old, not far from New Haven, Connecticut, with an energetic, somewhat evangelical pedagogue, George St. John, as its headmaster.

As part of her *pax maritalis*, Mrs. Kennedy had agreed in 1928 to the purchase of a large house with ample grounds in Bronxville, not far from their rented Riverdale house, which would become the family “base” for the next decade and a half — years of constant

move as Joe Kennedy “entered” politics, first to elect Roosevelt, then to serve him. Joe weathered the great Crash with the larger part of his ill-gotten fortune intact, but the experience made him cautious and protective in a wholly new way. He had made his millions by insider trading, stock pools, financial cunning, ruthlessness, and a lack of inhibition in trying new ventures. Watching whole family fortunes being wiped out overnight, he consolidated, his concern being to preserve a political fabric that would protect his wealth. Proximity to the political throne of America offered the best chance of influencing the future, as well as profiting by it. He thus became a financial backer of Franklin Roosevelt, and in due course would make a further fortune from Roosevelt’s repeal of Prohibition.

This conscious determination to be at the manipulatory end of events rather than being manipulated Joseph Kennedy extended to his family. He could have tried to get his sons into an old, established prep school, given his wealth and rising position in the world of finance, motion pictures, and, increasingly, politics, but his choice of Choate in Wallingford reflected his urge to maintain his parental hegemony. Russell Ayres, an old “cub” from the Harvard freshman baseball team he’d helped coach in 1912, was a teacher at the school, which was financially shaky and needed an infusion of wealthy offspring. Mr. Kennedy wanted to be wanted, and the school wanted him as a parent. Mrs. Kennedy disliked the notion of compulsory Protestant chapel every evening, but she was overruled. Though she gave in to her husband on the issue, she never visited the school again, despite its relative proximity to New York.

Jack Kennedy ought perhaps to have been relieved when his elder brother was sent away to boarding school, leaving him king of the Bronxville castle, but the truth is, he was locked into a competitive sibling rivalry that wasn’t good for either boy. Jack could be witty and amusing about many things. His father need not worry about Christmas presents, he wrote in late December 1929. “Due to fiancanil [*sic*] difficulties at Wall Street, we will not be encumbered by any weight in that direction. Woolworth’s five and ten cent store will probably be our object Saturday.” But the Swiftian tone soon gave way to more marked feelings when he described his brother Joe’s return from his first term at Choate. “When Joe came home, he was telling me how strong he was and how tough. The first thing he did to show me how tough he was was to get sick so that he could not have any Thanksgiving dinner. Manly youth,” he mocked at age twelve, adding, “He was going to show me how to Indian wrestle. I then through [*sic*] him on his neck” — this episode recalled Joe Junior’s recent beating at Choate when caught roughhousing by a sixth-former. “Did the sixth formers lick him. Oh man he was all blisters, they almost paddled the life out of him. . . . What I wouldn’t have given to be a sixth former. They have some pretty strong fellows up there if blisters have anything to do with it,” he remarked feelingly.

Perhaps this was what worried Mrs. Kennedy, that Choate was simply too rough for Jack, given his delicate health. More likely, however, it was the school’s religious denomination — at least that is what Seymour St. John, the headmaster’s son, later recalled: “I don’t know all the reasons why, but his mother was restive about Joe being at a non-Catholic school. She was a little nervous about that, and I think she rather pushed for Jack to go to a Catholic school.”

Why Jack needed to be sent away to boarding school so young, when he was doing so well at Riverdale, is a moot question. When Seymour St. John succeeded his father as headmaster of Choate many years later, the first thing he did was abolish the seventh-grade intake, for the children were simply too young for such uprooting: “It was the first thing I got rid of, the seventh grade. I didn’t think we were capable of handling this effec-

tively for that age group, and that group too often were sent away to school for reasons that weren't best for them, or the school. I found that we graduated only 33 percent of our seventh-graders six years later. So that was the proof."

Seymour St. John's father, however, was not of the same opinion, and it was he who had persuaded Mr. Kennedy to send Joe to board at Choate at fourteen, writing that he could not "help taking the liberty of urging you at least to consider the possibility of letting your sons have at least three years in the school from which they plan to enter college — four, we believe would be better! More and more, we see the added advantage that comes to the boy who has a really adequate chance to grow into the spirit of the school and to make a real place for himself among his fellows."

Mr. Kennedy had not immediately been won over. Though St. John had been ingratiatingly keen ("We 'fell' immediately for those attractive snapshots that were clipped to the applications" of both Joe Junior and Jack, he wrote, and talked of "mighty good Harvard material in the making"), Mr. Kennedy had been wary. "My only hesitancy," he explained, "is I realize that when the boys go away to school, they are practically gone forever, because it is three years there and then four years at college, and you realize how little you see of them after that. I may be selfish in wanting to hold on for another year at least."

In fact, Mr. Kennedy released Joe for four years, not three, and though Joe ultimately did well at Choate, his first year seems to have been purgatory. Though he had a high IQ and his Riverdale teacher had considered him "a manly, clean-minded boy, an excellent worker" ranking "in the upper quartile of his class," he did poorly in his first year at Choate, prompting his mother, if not to visit him, at least to apologize for his disappointing performance, writing that she was "very sorry indeed to hear that Joe is not up to what he should be in his studies. . . . I am going to write to Joe and urge him to do better work, and I am sure he will cooperate, as he has never been satisfied to have a low standing in his class. I have sent the various notes on to his father, who is in California."

Mr. Kennedy, who had been brought in to Pathé Exchange Inc. as its savior, was himself finding it more difficult to manage people than to fiddle the stock exchange, just as he had found when assistant manager at the Fore River shipyard. In a palace coup, while Kennedy was holidaying in Palm Beach early in 1930, he was ousted as chairman, returning to his shady dealings on Wall Street — and Franklin Roosevelt's election campaign.

For the moment, Joseph P. Kennedy managed to stay on the right side of the law and of history, demonstrating political prescience and independence of mind. Meanwhile, his "selfish" desire to keep his boys at home evaporated, and the only question became whether Jack should follow his brother to Choate.

Certainly the staff at Choate understood that Jack would be arriving in September 1930, but once again Jack's mother appears to have taken an unseen hand. In the fall of 1930, to Mr. St. John's puzzlement, Jack was suddenly sent away to Canterbury, a Roman Catholic boarding school near New Milford, Connecticut. It was a place after Mrs. Kennedy's own heart, set on a bluff, cold hill, with strict Catholic priests and seminarists for teachers: an austere, bleak institution with a huge stone chapel at its center, and a mere hundred pupils on its rolls.

Joe Junior, fifteen, began to prosper at Choate; Jack, thirteen, at Canterbury School, did not. He signed in at his new school on September 24, 1930, as an eighth-grader, one of thirty-two new boys — all Catholic.

Jack's surviving letters home are addressed "Dear Mother," while his letters to his father are addressed "Dear Dad." The handwriting is bold, with significant spaces be-

tween words, and the *ts* crossed high in all instances. His observations, whether about himself or school, are also bold and emphatic, with a pronounced sense of self. “It’s a pretty good place but I was pretty homesick the first night,” he wrote. “The swimming pool is great even though the football team looks pretty bad. You have a whole lot of religion and the studies are pretty hard. . . . This place is freezing at night and pretty cold in the daytime.” He turned down a new suit his mother sent him as he disliked the color “and it was a pretty itchy looking material,” he informed her that winter, also recounting the fate of one of his school companions in a serious accident while sledding at high speed. In a strangely prophetic brush with death, he had towed the injured boy half a mile uphill, then a further quarter mile to school. The boy “was all gray and as we carried him upstairs he fainted. He went to hospital an hour later and he was just a white grayish color. I think maybe he was operated on yesterday but I am not sure. He had internal injuries and I liked him a lot. That about all. Love to everybody, Love Jack.”

Did Jack hope to stir his mother, ever anxious about health and danger? Or was he simply recording, in his characteristically forceful yet emotionally detached way, the view from Canterbury hill? His postscript, announcing that he had lost two pounds, suggests the former — and is our first indication of a serious health problem that would dog him for the rest of his life.

He played baseball and football, and was good at both, but the absence of newspapers and journals disturbed him, even at the age of thirteen. “Please send me the *Literary Digest*,” he wrote to his father, “because I did not know about the Market Slump until a long time after, or a paper. We just finished breakfast and am going to chapel in about two minutes.”

Although he wanted to keep abreast of current events, he was most attached to his books. From early childhood, his preference had been romance and questing, King Arthur and his knights being his particular favorite. In early adolescence, Walter Scott kept him absorbed. “We are reading *Ivanhoe* in English,” he wrote to his father in early spring 1931, and a few weeks later to his mother: “P.S. We have Scott’s *Lady of the Lake* in English.” He wanted to do well, and proudly reported his marks as 93 in math, 95 in English, 80 in history, 78 in science, and 68 in Latin (he would never do well in languages); but his health was already playing up. A missionary had come to school to talk about India — “one of the most interesting talks that I ever heard” — but “when he was saying the Confiteor I began to get sick, dizzy and weak. I just about fainted and everything began to get black so I went out and then I fell and Mr. Hume [the headmaster] caught me. I am O.K. now,” he assured his father, adding, typically, that his brother Joe had “fainted twice in church so I guess I will live.”

But would he? It was soon clear that Jack’s medical problems were of a different magnitude from those of his older brother Joe at Choate. Shortly after Easter 1931 Jack became ill. “I was weighed yesterday and I have lost one pound and have not grown at all,” he had written to his mother. “I guess the only thing wrong with me is that I am pretty tired.” His work had been slipping, and the headmaster had had a word with him. “I have also been doing a little worrying about my studies because what he said about me starting of [*sic*] great and then going down sunk in. I will admit I did not work anymore than usual and I got pretty good marks.” The days of coasting along at the top of his class, however, were over. Puzzled by his symptoms, the doctor recommended an appendectomy, which was performed at a hospital in New Haven.

The appendix operation put paid to Jack Kennedy’s Canterbury career. So ill did he become that he was not sent back to school that term. Mr. Kennedy had been at logger-

heads with his wife about Jack's attending this strictly Catholic boarding school from the start, and must have already talked again to Mr. St. John about Jack switching schools and following his brother to Choate, for Wardell St. John, the assistant headmaster, had written to him on January 20, 1931, to say that "when I didn't hear, we took it for granted that Jack was returning to Canterbury. This is the better solution though we would have welcomed Jack here. . . . In any case, Jack is on our definite list for next Fall and we are hoping earnestly that the environment may agree with him as much as it seems to have agreed with Joe."

Jack's appendix operation in May 1931 provided all concerned with a break in his schooling that would make transfer to another school seem more natural, and on May 14 Mr. Kennedy's secretary wrote from New York to say that Jack would not "return to Canterbury for the balance of the term," but would be sent to Choate in the fall, subject, of course, to his passing the school's entrance examination. Once again, Mr. and Mrs. Kennedy were living separate lives, so that she was "in the South," in Florida, while Jack underwent his operation in New Haven and subsequent convalescence in Bronxville and Hyannis Port.

Strangely, though he sailed through the Choate School entrance exam in mathematics and history, Jack's Latin test was unsatisfactory, prompting Mrs. Kennedy to send handwritten letters to the school immediately when she reached Cape Cod to promise she would engage a private tutor so that by the end of September Jack would "know his first year Latin. As a matter of fact," she added, "he hates routine work but loves History and English and subjects which fire his imagination. . . . He has a very attractive personality — we think — but he is quite different from Joe for whom we feel you have done so much."

Joe Junior was indeed flourishing at Choate, from which he would graduate with honors and laurels. By contrast, Jack's years at the school would be little different from his brief sojourn at Canterbury — years marked by illness and an academic performance way below his potential — a square peg in a round hole. The truth is that Joe Junior, after early years of aggression, fitted; Jack did not. The schools were scarcely to blame, and indeed both have survived a further half century of elite instruction. Both have become coeducational, too; in Jack Kennedy's time both schools reflected the mores of the time, involving a rigid segregation of the sexes.

For Jack Kennedy the years at Choate were to be the most difficult of his life. Illness dogged him. Within weeks of arrival as a new boy in September 1931 he was in the infirmary; he was there again within weeks of the Christmas holiday, and again within weeks of the Easter vacation.

Outside the infirmary Jack presented a dichotomy. His first housemaster at Choate was also a sports coach and math teacher with a beautiful wife. Nicknamed "Cap" Leinbach, he had served with American Army Intelligence in France and Germany in World War I. At one point, Seymour St. John later recalled, Leinbach had been captured by the Germans "behind the lines and doing intelligence work, I guess, and he was taken out to be shot. And in a way I've never quite understood he disarmed his captors and got away, escaped. He was the kind of guy that would do that, if anybody would. Cappy liked Jack; he was very fond of kids, that was his 'basic.'" "Jack has a pleasing personality, and is warmly received by all the boys in the house," Leinbach reported after only a week. "Rules bother him a bit," he noted, however, and it wasn't long before his reports were recording an alarming lack of application.

No one was more concerned, however, than the headmaster, George St. John. In his forties he had taken holy orders, and he took an almost patriarchal interest in his school flock. No boy in the history of his headmastership — he had been headmaster since 1908 — presented a greater enigma to St. John. To use another analogy, St. John was like a horse breeder. To him, each of his charges was at school to be broken in to life's serious purpose. He sensed, from the very beginning, Jack Kennedy's potential. Jack scored 119 on the Otis IQ scale on entry; his intelligence rating actually went up four points during the year to 123 (the scale stopped at 130), yet the boy's performance lagged pitifully behind his native ability — and his behavior likewise. He got on so badly with his roommate that they drew a line down the middle of their room in Choate House, across which neither trod. "Jack's results are not yet commensurate with the standard we set for him," the headmaster reported. "His problem is still one of application." Jack's father wrote to say that he agreed "entirely. I feel that Jack has a great deal of natural ability, but is careless in applying it. Unless he receives pretty strict supervision, it might react against him as time went on."

But how to apply the strict supervision? As would become manifest, harsh discipline only made the problem worse. Mrs. Kennedy worried about Jack's failure to put on weight, harassing the headmaster's wife with letter after letter. "How is Jack's weight?" she demanded after New Year 1932. "My records show 114½ lbs. in September and 115 in January — after supper!" Mr. Kennedy cautioned against too much candy — but of love there was no mention, save in the letters Jack wrote home asking after his brother and sisters.

Wardell St. John, the headmaster's brother, was exasperated by such parental nagging about weight and diet. "He looks well as far as I can see, but he's Irish, crazy about athletics, and emotional. The combination doesn't produce the kind of calmness that encourages added pounds!"

It didn't. Illness vied with ill behavior. "Is Jack studying any harder and any more steadily?" the headmaster minuted the housemaster. "I know you are doing all you can, but Jack has me worried."

Mr. Kennedy was donating many thousands of dollars' worth of cinematic projection equipment to the school, which made St. John's failure to solve "Jack's problem" even worse. But Cap Leinbach had no magic Kepler's Malt (Mrs. Kennedy's remedy) that would restore Jack's equilibrium. No one, not even his eventual wife, could tame the errant, wounded knight, so restless and spirited. "What makes the whole problem difficult is Jack's winning smile and charming personality," explained Mr. Leinbach to the headmaster. "It is an inescapable fact that his actions are *really* amusing and evoke real hilarity."

In a less intelligent child, Jack's failure to concentrate and toe the school or classroom line would have become a bore rather than a challenge. But all who dealt with Jack were captivated by his contradictions, and won over by his wit and zest. Joe Junior might be a chip off the old block, but Jack seemed to have his own block, in every sense of the word. The year before, from Canterbury School, Jack had written to his father that he was reading *Ivanhoe* in English "and though I may not be able to remember material things such as tickets, gloves and so on I can remember things like *Ivanhoe* and the last time we had an exam on it I got a ninety-eight."

The days of 98 were over, however. His untidiness and indiscipline were an affront to the staff of the school. "To fasten his mind upon an assigned task is his most difficult job.

for he is bubbling over with a host of half-formed ideas of a different type. . . . Whenever Jack wants a clean shirt or suit,” his housemaster recorded, “it is necessary for him to pull every shirt or suit out of the drawer or closet, and then he ‘does not have time’ to put them back. His room is inspected night and morning every day, and I always find the floor cluttered up with articles of every description. When he sees me enter the room he will at once start to put everything in order. He does it willingly and often remarks, ‘I never get away with anything in this place.’”

Despite Mr. Leinbach’s eagle eye, things went from bad to worse, and Jack ended his first year at Choate failing French and Latin in the annual examinations. Meanwhile his mother had just given birth to her final child (prompting Joe Senior’s facetious remark that if she gave birth to any more children he would give her a black eye), and she now telephoned the headmaster — an “impassioned message from Mrs. Kennedy that things must be arranged so that Jack does not have to tutor this summer. She said that with nine children it was impossible for her to take on the extra burden,” the headmaster’s wife noted.

Was Mr. Wheeler of the Belmore Tutorial Agency in Hyannis such a burden? The truth is, Jack’s lackadaisical approach to life and domestic discipline were more than Mrs. Kennedy could cope with, and who can blame her? She could not, with so many children, be inspecting his room morning and night, as well as running after him all day long — and yet, psychologically, Jack’s behavior was probably unconsciously designed with that very end in mind. It certainly kept Mr. Leinbach’s attention. Rose Kennedy, however, was a formidable opponent. Though Jack would go on to break a thousand girls’ hearts — even the heart of his nation in death — he never broke Rose Kennedy’s. He was simply sent back to school for the summer.

“I think Jack needs to learn right now that work which is not done during the school year has to be made up in the summer,” the headmaster had written to Jack’s father. If this was a trifle harsh, considering the bouts of illness that had kept Jack out of class, it was perfectly fair in terms of unapplied ability. But although Jack made sure he never failed another subject so as to necessitate summer school, his attitude to school did not alter. Winston Churchill had despised formal instruction at Harrow, having to attend a “crammer” or tutorial school even to get into military college (Sandhurst). Likewise, Jack Kennedy — as romantic and mother-fixated as Churchill — was out to make his mark in his *own* way, not according to the expectations of others.

Rose Kennedy might be too busy as a mother of nine to give her errant second son the love he craved, but she meant well. What she could not give in openhearted warmth she gave in the only way she knew, bombarding the school with letters about Jack’s health, and even exhorting the school — which she would never visit save for the unveiling of a bust of her son in 1967 — to instruct its boys in the formal techniques of letter writing. “The fact has come to my attention that some boys at Choate do not seem to know how to write a letter correctly,” she admonished the headmaster, Mr. St. John. “It would be a practical idea if a short period could be given demonstrating the different forms.” For Mrs. Kennedy, the “forms” — social, religious, educational — meant a great deal.

Jack Kennedy’s response to this was something that would increasingly dominate his life at school, in puberty and adolescence. School became a sort of foreign field in which he was condemned to fight. For the rest of his life he would maintain a love-hate relationship with it, knowing how much he owed to teachers like Leinbach and even Mr. St. John, for all his pomposity and pedagogic rhetoric; they had *cared* about him in a way that his

own mother couldn't, and for that he would always be grateful. "All last year I worried about Jack," St. John informed the school's rooming committee, and he meant it. "He is an able boy with the cleverest turn of mind," he acknowledged, and he felt that Leinbach had shown "genius" in the way he had dealt with Jack, whereas the new housemaster, Mr. Musser, was far too lax. Jack needed, in St. John's view, "an older, experienced Master, one with a sense of humor and a rod of iron."

Mrs. Kennedy had beaten her sons as small children and, according to her last born, continued to do so, using clothes hangers as her favorite instrument of punishment. But Jack was too big now to humble in that way, too bright, too potentially loving. It would be a mistake to sentimentalize his journey, yet how otherwise can we make sense of the childhood and youth of this future president, whose adult life would be such an extraordinary and unpredictable ascent? He would astonish his father and mother and even his closest friends. Most of all he would surprise himself. Yet the truth is that the potpourri of half-baked ideas that perplexed his masters, his indiscipline and lack of concentration at school, masked a very mixed-up boy who could not conform to a second tyranny on top of the one he'd endured, and would continue to endure, at home. He seems not to have known depression or great introspection; instead, he set about constructing a Jack Kennedy world.

The first indication of a school problem that went beyond lack of academic application came with his new housemaster's initial report, in Jack's second year at Choate. "My only criticism," wrote Mr. Musser, "is his tendency to foster a gang spirit." The truth was, Jack was in search of a cause, a challenge, something on which he could cut his teeth. Whether the reason was psychological or physiological is difficult to say; even the headmaster, whose insight into Jack Kennedy was uncanny, came to feel the problem was a matter of his "glands." "If Jack were my own son I believe I should take him to a gland specialist," he would note shortly before expelling him.

Whatever the cause — and in the classical narcissistic case, resentment against a mother's withholding of early warmth during the first, crucial infantile years is seen as the motivating cause behind the patient's psychological defenses — Jack Kennedy put his energies into a network of social relationships he could turn to his own advantage. "He was easygoing, had a sunny disposition, and was popular with everyone — all qualities I frankly envied," recalled one boy, a year senior to Jack at Choate. His new housemaster's lack of harsh discipline defeated him. "I want to come back to Choate House," he is said to have told Cap Leinbach. "Down where I am now I can get away with anything — and it's no fun."

Fun was to become Jack Kennedy's leitmotif, the operating imperative for the rest of his life: his own, special response to the cards the good Lord had dealt him, from medical infirmity to psychological injury, from "inferior" sibling status to physiological glandular developments over which he had no control. He really began to have fun in his third year at Choate, after his elder brother's triumphant graduation; Joe Junior had won the coveted Crimson Trophy for the boy who best combined scholarship and sporting achievement.

In the fall of 1933 Jack was at least freed of his brother's shadow. His father and mother had traveled to Europe with Roosevelt's son to meet Mussolini — and to obtain lucrative liquor licenses in anticipation of Roosevelt's repeal of Prohibition. Jack had left East Cottage and was in the school's West Wing, under the stern authority of John J. Maher, his English teacher of the year before. "Maher was a highly disciplined fellow," Seymour St. John recalled, "and came from a family, not unlike the Kennedy family, of Irish Catho-

lics. He lived in Bridgeport, came as a scholarship boy to Choate in the early twenties, was an excellent athlete, good at baseball and basketball, went on to Harvard, played on the Harvard football team, and then came back to Choate to teach. My family were very fond of him — he stayed with us in the summers on Rhode Island as our family tutor. As I say, he was personally disciplined, and I liked him *very* much.” But Jack did not; in fact Maher now became Jack Kennedy’s *bête noir*, and there began a duel between housemaster and pupil that would end only with Jack Kennedy’s departure. Moreover, Jack had a new bosom companion, LeMoyné Billings, a big, strapping, lost soul whose father, a doctor, had died the year before — who also stood in the shadow of a high achieving elder brother. The two boys became instant friends, with Jack Kennedy determined to challenge the established ethos and rules of the school, and supplant them with his own.

J.J. Maher had educated Choate boys for ten years on the basis of fear, but Jack was completely unafraid. As Seymour St. John said, “The usual motto held good at school with teachers as with much else: If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em. But with Jack Kennedy it was the reverse. If Jack felt he couldn’t join ’em, then he was going to whip ’em. He was ready to fight, and he fought Maher.”

Maher’s reaction was far from flexible. “I think Maher’s only way, if people were going to fight him, his only way, was discipline, toughness,” Seymour St. John recalled. “He disciplined himself, and by God he was going to discipline those who needed to be disciplined. And he knew that his floor, his corridor so-called, had the reputation of being a very disciplined hall. The kids were on time, they were neat, and they knew that was the rule. They did their job.

“Jack Kennedy got tossed into that, and he wanted no part of it. He wasn’t neat, he wasn’t on time, he was a sloppy kid at that age. He didn’t do his work effectively — he went through the motions, but he never really worked at it. . . . I think J.J. Maher got to the point where he did not like Jack Kennedy. I don’t think he ever took it out on him, but it was not a happy relation.”

Jack’s choice of companion was bound to make things worse, Seymour St. John related.

LeMoyné Billings was a tragedy — a tragedy in himself and a tragedy really for Jack. “Josh” Billings, LeMoyné’s brother, was a very good friend of mine. Again, he was a first son, captain of the football team at Princeton, and he did everything right. Then LeMoyné came along, second son; he was a big, handsome boy, did adequate work, but he had nothing really to hold on to, and when he found Jack Kennedy, he just thought this was it, this was for him. And he would do *anything* for Jack Kennedy. Anything Jack did, he would follow right along with him, and be the stooge, and was inseparable from Jack those last two years, which were not good for Jack. Jack liked him, he liked very much having somebody at his beck and call who’d always go along with his jokes, pranks, or whatever. But there was never any LeMoyné saying, “I don’t think that’s a good idea.” It was *always* a good idea if it was Jack’s idea.

Well, anyhow, in those years I think the main thing about Jack Maher — I don’t think he was quite creatively imaginative enough to get Jack wanting to do what he wanted him to do. He tried, but at that time Jack needed, I think, a different kind of master. He needed a Leinbach more than he needed a Maher.

Jack was determined, now that his brother Joe was out of the way, to do as he pleased, and only as much as he pleased. In Harold Tinker he had an inspiring English teacher who recognized that although Jack Kennedy didn’t *appear* to apply himself, he was extremely gifted, something that astonished even Jack’s friends, such as Ralph Horton, who said, many years later:

Was he a great student in those days? No. He was a very mediocre student. He did have one particular flair that stands out in my mind and that was a flair for writing. We would have to submit essays two or three times a year and we had an English teacher by the name of Dr. Tinker. I can remember that after we had submitted our essays, Dr. Tinker said to Jack Kennedy, "Jack, you have a very definite flair for writing. It's a career that you should think of pursuing when you graduate from school and college." And it came as sort of a shock to me because I never considered Jack Kennedy a very outstanding student in any particular area.

To be liked by his peers, it was important not to be labeled intellectual. Jack therefore kept his intellect well concealed, as always, beneath his thatch of unruly, curly brown hair, dressing sloppily and becoming almost fanatical in his passion for sport, even though he would never be well enough to shine at any save swimming, which, in the absence of a pool, was not practiced at Choate. "He wanted very much to be liked by other boys," Seymour St. John recalled. "He made some good friends, and he was loyal to his friends, and peer group meant much more to him than teachers, who were sort of antagonists." Only sometimes did Jack allow his native intellect to shine through. Despite his weak concentration he undoubtedly imbibed a great deal from the Choate faculty, as Courtenay Hemenway, the head of the history department later recalled.

His examination grades were almost always considerably higher than those of his daily work, a sign of native ability. He realized his high potential in history, where he blossomed under the brilliant teaching and great knowledge of details of Russell Ayres. He appreciated Ayres's off-beat information and constitutional learning. In fact, perhaps here began Jack's thorough and versatile understanding of government and politics. Jack also appreciated his experience with perhaps the best English department in secondary schools — Douglas Shepardson, Harold Tinker, Audley Fitts, Carey Briggs, Darrah Kelley, Allen Smart, and William Freeman, all of whom he had. He understood the reading, even when he hadn't read it.

Hemenway's strange assertion was mirrored by Jack's classmate David Beecher Stowe: "I sat next to Jack in our English history course. The one time that seemed noteworthy to the rest of us was his copy of the textbook, which remained unopened at the end of the school year; yet Jack managed to get the minimum passing grade."

Ralph Horton noted the same and asked Jack how he did it.

He was very interested in political events and particularly international events. . . . We used to listen to an old radio program called *Information Please*, and they'd ask very difficult questions, everything from sports to opera. One particular time we were listening to the program and I'd know roughly 10 percent of the answers and Jack Kennedy would know 50 or 60 percent. He never seemed to read any more than I did. he wasn't a better student, and I, at that time, didn't think he was brighter than I was. I asked him how he happened to do so well on these particular tests.

Horton was bowled over by Jack Kennedy's unusually serious answer: "I'll pick up an article, I'll read it, and then I'll force myself to lie down for almost half an hour and go through the total article in my mind, bringing to memory as much as I possibly can. Then analyzing the article, and then attacking it and tearing it down."

This was not said boastfully. LeMoyné Billings remembered the same evidence of ability, adding: "I don't think I know any other kid who subscribed to the *New York Times* at fourteen, fifteen, and read it every morning." Though J.J. Maher was unimpressed, other teachers became aware of Jack's talent, and one at least, Russell Ayres, alerted Mr. Ken-

nedy to it. “Mr. Ayres told me that [Jack] has one of the few great minds he has ever had in History,” Mr. Kennedy wrote at one point to his eldest son, Joe Junior, “yet they all recognize the fact that he lacks any sense of responsibility and it will be too bad if with the brains he has he really doesn’t go as far up the ladder as he should.”

Jack Kennedy, however, was determined to keep his brains to himself and rejected the ladder before him. This was precisely what infuriated Mr. Kennedy when he returned from a brilliantly successful trip to Europe with Jimmy Roosevelt. He had already banked a fortune by quasi-fraudulent trading in a stock pool that deliberately pushed up the share price of the Libby-Owens plate glass company that would be confused in the public’s mind with a beer-bottle manufacturer of the same name, Owens, prior to Prohibition’s repeal, then dumped the stock before the public realized the mistake. Once in England Kennedy had obtained the U.S. franchises for Haig and Haig, John Dewar, and Gordon’s Dry Gin, importing millions of bottles of whiskey for “medicinal” purposes so as to be ready for the moment of repeal. In the interim, however, on September 25, he had written to George St. John to thank him for what the school had done for his eldest son, Joe Junior — and to complain in execrable English about his second son:

But I feel that the fundamental thing to watch is the absolute necessity of keeping him employed in various enterprises. I feel definitely sure that he can do things very well, provided he has enough of them to do and feels he is getting results. Unfortunately he has not gained any weight this summer; therefore, football is not a possibility. I think he must be very carefully watched to see that he is headed into other enterprises such as the *Brief* [the Choate School magazine, written and produced by the pupils], rowing and other things to keep his mind active.

He still has a tendency to be careless in details, and really is not very determined to be a success. Occupation in a number of things seems to be, to me at least, one of the important steps for his future.

Mrs. Kennedy and I will be back around the middle of November. We shall come up to see you at that time to learn how he is getting along.

Mrs. Kennedy never did appear, but Mr. Kennedy did. Jack was in fact playing junior football. Cap Leinbach considered Jack a “tower of strength on the line,” but Mr. Kennedy thought otherwise: “I can’t tell you how unhappy I felt in seeing and talking with Jack,” he wrote candidly to St. John. “He seems to lack entirely a sense of responsibility. His happy-go-lucky manner with a degree of indifference does not portend well for his future development,” he complained.

The headmaster was caught between two stools. He thanked Mr. Kennedy for his “helpful letter,” but to his great credit, stood up for his charge. “I am ready to bet right now that Jack will follow in Joe’s footsteps, though he may have to go through an immature phase meantime . . . Every boy is different. But I never saw a boy with as many fine qualities as Jack has, that didn’t come out right, under the right conditions, and living with the right people, in the end.” St. John promised to write more fully when he’d spoken to Jack and his masters once more, so that he could properly “analyze the situation.” This he did, and his letter must stand as one of the most insightful ever written about Jack Kennedy at this time:

Jack and I talked together for a good while yesterday, and since you gave me permission, I let him read your letter. I also let him read the reports from his different masters. I asked Jack if he had had a good chance to talk with you when you were here, and he said that there really wasn’t very much time. He said you had more time to talk with

some of his masters than him, and that when you talked with him, you were of course “rather peeved.”

My honest belief is that we need to do for Jack two things: one, follow him up and check him all the time; two, treat him as a man, and show that we have confidence in him.

The phrase “in loco parentis” was never better merited than now, as headmaster and pupil formed perhaps a closer bond of understanding than father and son.

I hope very much that my conviction about Jack will not trouble you, and that you will sense that it is no hasty conviction. The fact of the matter is that I cannot feel seriously uneasy or worried about Jack. The longer I live and work with him and the more I talk with him, the more confidence I have in him. I would be willing to bet anything that within two years you will be as proud of Jack as you are now of Joe.

Jack has a clever, individualist mind. It is a harder mind to put into harness than Joe’s — harder for Jack himself to put in harness. When he learns the right place for humor and learns to use his individual way of looking at things as an asset instead of a handicap, his natural gift of an individual outlook and witty expression are going to help him. A more conventional mind and a more plodding and mature point of view would help him a lot more right now; but we have to allow, my dear Mr. Kennedy, with boys like Jack, for a period of adjustment. All that natural cleverness Jack has to learn how to use in his life and work, even how to cover it up at times, how to subordinate it and all the rest. I never yet saw a clever, witty boy who at some stage in his early development was not considered fresh. It is only because he hasn’t learned how to use his natural gift. We must allow for a period of adjustment and growing up; and the final product is often more interesting and more effective than the boy with a more conventional mind who has been to us parents and teachers much less trouble.

It was a noble letter, but not even Mr. St. John could have predicted that within eighteen months he would be on the point of expelling Jack from his school. Far from rewarding St. John for his literally masterly faith in him, Jack Kennedy became wilder and less controllable, driving Mr. Maher, his housemaster, to despair.

Those wishing to see in Jack Kennedy’s childhood problems a physiological malfunction can certainly point to a seemingly endless array of illnesses that went largely undiagnosed; the worst of these came at the end of January 1934, when he was sixteen. At first he was put in the infirmary, but the school doctor became anxious and Jack was taken by ambulance to New Haven, where the doctors could only say he was seriously ill with a “blood infection.” Prayers were said for him in chapel, and Mr. and Mrs. St. John went to see him, but Mrs. Kennedy, holidaying in Florida, did not even appear, relying on Mr. Kennedy’s assistant Eddie Moore for secondhand information.

Jack’s body had become covered with swellings or hives. Eddie Moore, visiting Jack in hospital, attempted to encourage him by telling him the doctors were “simply delighted to have the trouble come out to the surface instead of staying inside.” To which Jack shot back: “Gee! The doctors must be having a happy day!”

“Jack’s sense of humor hasn’t left him for a minute,” Mrs. St. John wrote to Mrs. Kennedy, admiringly. “This morning Jack had his first meal, after what must have seemed a terribly long time, and he said to me: ‘It was just as well that they decided to give me breakfast; if they didn’t, I think the nurse would have come in pretty soon and looked in my bed and not been able to see me at all.’

“We’re still puzzled as to the cause of Jack’s trouble,” Mrs. St. John confessed. “He didn’t look at all well when he came back after Christmas, but apparently had improved

steadily since then — and it was a great shock to us to find him so sick when we ourselves returned from Florida Saturday afternoon.”

Mrs. St. John took Jack’s Victrola to the hospital, and his books. Mr. St. John, racing against time to get out the school reports, became quite emotional in writing to Mr. Kennedy: “Jack is one of the best people that ever lived — one of the most able and interesting . . . *We pray Jack is better every hour.*”

On February 28 Jack Kennedy left the hospital to convalesce in Florida, whence he wrote a charming letter to Mrs. St. John, his surrogate mother, to “thank you for your numerous kindnesses to me when I was in the hospital. I’ll never be able to repay them, and so I’ll have to be satisfied with just letting you know my appreciation.”

His appreciation didn’t last long, however. He’d shown courage and wit in adversity, impressing the St. Johns and all who witnessed his brush with death — passed off at the time as hepatitis. Yet it seemed as if this very courage and wit, so touching in its self-deprecating quality, served as the engine of survival, but once in good health, became wild and directionless. The remainder of the winter term and the Easter vacation were spent in Florida, and he returned to Choate in April 1934, shortly before his seventeenth birthday. By June, at the close of the school year, he had caught up enough in his work to pass honorably in English, history, chemistry, and French — but his behavior caused Mr. Maher to despair.

Jack takes a great deal of understanding, for he is such a complete individualist in theory and practice that the ordinary appeals of group spirit and social consciousness (even to the plea of not walking on the other fellow’s feet) have no effect. To say that I understand Jack is more an expression of fond hope than a statement of fact. Jack is young in his ways, and sometimes childish in his actions, but his head is old. At first his attitude was, You’re a master or a sixth former and I am a lively young fellow with a nimble brain and a bag full of tricks. You will spoil my fun if I let you, so here I go; catch me if you can.

When he discovered that no one was getting particularly excited about his silly game, or that he was playing the simpleton to his own amusement, the game lost its zest. And now for the first time I’m beginning to hope a little that Jack has learned to distinguish between liberty and license.

The hope was in vain, for inside Jack’s churning heart were a host of unresolved contradictions and buried wounds. Toward Mrs. St. John he could be his brave, charming self, with a sense of self-deprecating humor that won over even the sternest of his critics; but with his friends like LeMoyné Billings, a tougher, more savage, more injured psyche emerged. He had, the previous June, obtained a number of advertisements for the school magazine, on which Billings worked. “If you should want me to do anything during the summer, I will be at the [Cape Cod] address during the next three months,” he wrote, ending, “I’ll see you next fall which is a darned sight too near for comfort.”

Such remarks were and would be the nearest Jack Kennedy would come to a statement of affection. In part this reflected the macho, “tough boy” image he wished to inhabit, but it concealed intense loneliness and a need for company, as his burgeoning correspondence with Billings would reveal. The letters were so profane that Jack worried about their falling into the wrong hands: “Dear Crap!” he wrote from the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota in June 1934. “I had to laugh Ha-Ha about you not getting any letters — I’ve written you 3 already or 4. Somebody must be intercepting the mails. I hope to hell that nobody reads them because they would think I was a terribly ‘unclean-cut guy.’”

It was here that Jack Kennedy’s adolescence played itself out. Mr. St. John had pre-

dicted that Jack's failure to apply himself was merely a passing phase, after which he would start to match his elder brother in his father's estimation. In the longer term this would be so, but St. John underestimated the force of Jack's feelings, and his difficult adjustment to adolescence. *Ivanhoe* and *The Lady of the Lake* were no longer enough: he had finally, as a young adult, to come to terms with an absent, frigid mother, a father whose expectations he could not fulfill, and a series of illnesses he himself could not control and the doctors could not properly identify. "I am suffering terribly out here," he admitted to Billings, "and I now have gut ache all the time. I'm still eating peas and corn for my food and I had an enema given by a beautiful blonde. That, my sweet, is the height of cheap thrills." His father had telephoned — "For 20 min. he was trying to find out what was wrong with me and for 20 minutes we were trying to hedge around the fact that we didn't know." Even school was preferable to the endless tests at the Mayo, which were due to run on for a further fortnight, while Billings was billeted with Jack's parents at Cape Cod, awaiting his release from hospital. "I feel very sorry for my family being burdened with you for 2 or 3 weeks, but I am burdened with you for 9 mo[nths]," he remarked sarcastically.

"Burn this when you get finished," Jack ordered, "and for God's sake don't leave it around." Yet this profane and bitter part of his personality was the matrix of his socially acceptable self, a duality that would characterize the rest of his life. In the eyes of his contemporaries and of his teachers, Billings was a bad influence, parasitical and lax, but the many hundreds of letters Jack Kennedy wrote to Billings over the years from 1933 to 1946 testify to the importance, for Jack, of such an intimate, loyal bond: a friend who would cheerfully take all the insults, sarcasm, contempt, malice, envy, and gall that Jack Kennedy hurled at him, knowing, instinctively, that this was something that had to come out, like the draining of an infected psychological wound. Jack Kennedy's path to greatness would by no means be linear; indeed he would have to surmount a thousand setbacks and trials before reaching the seat of ultimate power. But inasmuch as Billings performed that vital role of confidant, of king's fool, of long-suffering foil to Jack Kennedy's painful, barbed wit, Billings may be said without sentimentality to have been a true and remarkable friend. Let down by his mother, unable still to find common ground with his somewhat ogreish father, Jack Kennedy was testing the world around him — trying the patience of everyone from doctors to teachers — and it was Billings's *loyalty* that helped him to emerge from his adolescent trials with his confidence in himself strengthened rather than broken. If a boy like Lem Billings could follow him through the proverbial thick and thin and still *believe* in him, then life, *his* life must be important and worthwhile. not in Choate terms, or in his father's expectations, but in his *own* terms.

The crisis of Jack's school career was about to come. From St. John's view it would be a crisis of authority, of *his* authority versus Jack's. In Mr. Kennedy's terms it would be a crisis of Jack's basic irresponsibility or childishness. But in Jack Kennedy's terms it was not a crisis at all, but a climax. From puberty onward he had been testing the parameters and frontiers of his existence, testing the limits of affection felt for him by his mother, his father, his teachers, his siblings, his friends — and their patience. In that sense it was, of course, childish, particularly in one who had, as even Maher observed, such a mature head upon his shoulders; but it was touching too, for this would be a turning point in Jack Kennedy's life.

Jack Kennedy remained in the Mayo Clinic and Saint Mary's Hospital, Minnesota, for a month, undergoing an endless succession of enemas and tests, as well as the strict diet of peas and corn. But apart from remarking "what an interesting case" it was, the medical

profession could find no explanation. “If Jack showed the slightest tendency to a relapse he would have to be taken out of school for a year,” his father reported to St. John, “and sent, possibly, down south. Of course this greatly concerns me and at the same time annoys Jack very much.”

It did. In hospital Jack had been cosseted, manhandled, and womanhandled in a disturbing way for an adolescent — had become the pet of the hospital, with limitless attention. He’d been spoiled, in other words, and, once his health was restored on Cape Cod, his main concern was to have fun. “I am now sporting around the beaches in flesh-colored bathing trunks acquiring that chocolate tan which is the rage this year at Newport and Hyannisport,” he wrote to Lem Billings. He nicknamed himself “Hot Screw” and did not look forward to returning to “that Hole again,” as he referred to Choate.

In his mind, and certainly in his sexual awakening, he had already left school and was not prepared to act out meek obedience and set a responsible sixth-form example to the juniors as his elder brother had done. Joe Junior had spent a year in London, studying at the London School of Economics under Harold Laski, the socialist thinker and writer, and had accompanied Laski on a servile trip to Russia. “Joe came back about 3 days ago and is a communist. Some shit, eh,” Jack commented in a letter to Billings. At Choate, on their return in September, the two adolescents became inseparable — and a growing threat to St. John’s authority. J.J. Maher was again their housemaster, his bedroom next to theirs, and his patience soon ran out. “Attitude poor at the outset; sloppy, seldom on time; but has shown a reversal of form and is really having an excellent try,” Maher reported in October; but by November the signs were ominous. “Matched only by his roommate, Billings, in sloppiness and continued lateness,” he expostulated. “All methods of coercion fail,” he admitted.

Aware that his father would be receiving such reports, Jack quickly wrote to him, promising to turn over a new leaf — “I thought I would write you right away as LeMoyné and I have been talking about how poorly we have done this quarter,” he confessed in his best handwriting (his father having complained about how “disgraceful” it was), “and we have definitely decided to stop any fooling around. I really do realize how important it is that I get a good job done this year if I want to go to England” — for his father had promised Jack the same opportunity to study under Laski as his brother Joe had had. “I really feel, now that I think it over, that I have been bluffing myself about how much real work I have been doing.”

Such contrition was short-lived. In the next days it would be clear that Jack’s life was paved with good intentions, none of which he could fulfill. To Mr. Kennedy’s irritation, he was soon in even more hot water, with the headmaster, and though allowed to join his family for Christmas in Florida, was ordered back to school early, on January 7, “in lieu of discipline at this time,” St. John informed Mr. Kennedy.

Such discipline did not, however, do the trick. Mr. Kennedy had written to Jack in December that “after long experience in sizing up people, I definitely know you have the goods, and you can go a long way,” and presumably said the same to him at Christmas. But such faith in Jack’s talents, that he would turn out “a really worthwhile citizen with good judgment and understanding,” were not what Jack wanted. In the turbulence of adolescence, with the conspiring forces of sexual awakening, and of desire to shed the oppressive shroud of parenthood and discover his own identity, he was approaching that showdown with parental authority which could crush or connect him.

“As you know, I am still considerably concerned about his health,” Mr. Kennedy wrote to St. John after the holidays. “However I agree that he still lacks the proper attitude to-

ward the consideration of his problems. I have always felt that he has a fine mind. He is quite kiddish about his activities and although I have noticed a tremendous improvement this year, I still feel that what he needs to be trained in is the ability to get a job done.”

Mr. Kennedy was, however, still skirting the issue. To St. John and the school staff it was obvious that Jack was not in a real mood to “get a job done.” He was spoiling for a fight, and it was not long in coming. As St. John’s son later recalled, “With the winter term, J.J. Maher justifiably showed signs of getting to the end of his rope.” Maher’s report to St. John, after a January talk with Jack and Billings, was one of the worst he’d ever written:

I’m afraid it would be almost foolishly optimistic to expect anything but the most mediocre from Jack. He’d like to be a “somebody” in school, but as in practically everything else, he wants to sit back and have it all fall into his lap, standing off on the sidelines catcalling and criticizing those who *do* things.

For a year-and-a-half, I’ve tried everything from kissing to kicking Jack into just a few commonly decent points of view and habits of living in community life, and I’m afraid I must admit my own failure as well as his. Jack is prompt only under the club; neat virtually never. He has little sportsmanship (not even the lower politic type of “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours”). Unfortunately it must be all for Jack or he won’t play. . . . Neither Jack nor his roommate has accepted his duties as a Sixth Former. It is too late, I believe, for them to repair their lost position here, because from the outset they have demonstrated in their silly, giggling, inseparable companionship that the good of the group takes second place to their convenience.

The group, however, was a matter of definition. St. John soon castigated in his Sunday sermon those “muckers” who worked against the common good of the school, but in doing so he involuntarily gave Jack Kennedy a name for the clique he was building around himself.

J.J. Maher had criticized Jack for not even observing the basic political forms — “It must be all for Jack or he won’t play” — and Maher was right. Neither in Congress nor the Senate would Jack Kennedy indulge in mutual back-scratching; it was not his style, and he was not good at it. Where he excelled was in gathering around him friends and followers, and with these he now set about challenging St. John’s authority. Having decided on the name Muckers (akin to the English term “navvies,” used to describe cheap Irish laborers who did the basic spadework in digging drains, ditches, roads, and railway routes), Kennedy even arranged with the local jewelry shop to make a series of small gold shovels as the group’s emblem — “About \$12, as I remember,” one of the twelve “disciples,” Paul Chase, stated. “I roomed at that time with a member of the Student Council,” Chase continued. “I told him that we were going to bring in a pile of horse manure and have our picture taken on the dance floor over Spring Festivities with our gold shovels! He apparently took me seriously and passed the word on to the head.”

St. John was not amused; indeed, he was livid. As he later confessed, “At one time it came to the point where I was saying to myself, ‘Well, I have two things to do — one to run the school, another to run Jack Kennedy and his friends.’”

St. John had no doubt as to who was “the chief mover in the group,” as he put it. “The next day at lunch the head read off our thirteen names to the accompaniment of low whistles from the assembly,” Chase recalled. “He demanded our presence in his study immediately after lunch. The head ended a rather lengthy meeting with a statement that he deemed us unfit to continue at Choate, and we were thereupon dismissed from school.” Maurice Shea, another pupil, remembered, “We were told we were no longer students at

Choate; we could go pack our bags.” Ralph Horton, secretary of the Choate Muckers Club said, “We were bad apples and were corrupting the morals and integrity of the other students in the school. And at that stage of the game Mr. St. John dismissed each one of us from school — expelled us.” Looking back on the event many years later, Maurice Shea remarked, “I don’t blame him. He thought that we were not quite the boys that he wanted to have the stamp of Choate on. So after luncheon we were all called into his study and, as I remember, he talked to us, one by one, told us our faults, and announced that there was a train sometime between five and six o’clock and that was the train we should be on. However, somehow, between two o’clock and five o’clock he relented or changed his mind and somehow we were given a second chance.”

St. John himself made notes after the occasion. The thirteen Muckers he considered a

colossally selfish, pleasure loving, unperceptive group — in general opposed to the hardworking, solid people in the school, whether master or boys.

The emblem of this group is a shovel. It was suggested among them that they have their pictures taken at Festivities, each pulling his girl on a shovel; and again that they have their picture taken, standing beside a manure pile, to show that the shovels were used.

In his study St. John “told the whole group that I would expel one or all of them, I didn’t care which, if the spirit of our school was at stake. . . . I certainly read them a riot act. . . . The three of the lot who perhaps are the best candidates for expulsion are Ralph Horton, Jim Wilde, and Jack Kennedy.”

Without certificates of honorable dismissal from the school at the end of the academic year, none of the Muckers would be able to go on to universities, at least not to the Ivy League colleges. “I know now that he was just trying to scare us to death, but it all seemed very real at the time,” Chase recalled.

It was certainly real enough for Mr. Kennedy to catch the Saturday train from Washington, where, ironically, he was running Roosevelt’s Securities and Exchange Commission to clean up Wall Street, when summoned by telegram. “His father received a message one day saying, ‘There is a crisis in Jack’s life here at Wallingford. Please come at once,’” Rose Kennedy remembered when she unveiled the bust of her son at Choate School. “He was working in Washington for President Roosevelt. The president said, ‘But there’s a financial crisis here in Washington. You’ve got to stay!’ But, being a father, the president quite understood my husband’s apprehension, so my husband came up here,” she recounted.

The whole idea behind the Muckers was that there would be safety in numbers — “Jack’s main thesis was that we were such ‘wheels’ the head could not kick us *all* out,” one of them, Bob Beach, recalled. In that sense, Jack Kennedy’s first political party — of school anarchists — had failed, for most of the group were terrified, as St. John quickly realized. But Jack Kennedy was more frightened of his father’s wrath than he was of St. John. The succession of poor reports and failure to apply himself had already tested his father’s patience. His mother had already become more like a distant relative than the woman who had given him birth; now he stood to “lose” his father too.

In a very real sense, this was the turning point in Jack Kennedy’s adolescence, and one may legitimately wonder whether he would have survived as the self-confident, brave (in the face of continual, undiagnosed illness), and aspiring young man he became if his father had turned against him.

Lem Billings later recalled how anxious Jack became. “It was one thing to take on St. John; it was quite another to confront his father. For hours he just kept pacing around the room, unable to sit still. . . . He was terrified that his father would lose confidence in him once and for all.”

At noon on Sunday, February 17, 1935, Mr. Kennedy reached Wallingford and was shown into the headmaster’s study, where St. John set before him his decision to expel Jack unless the Muckers were instantly disbanded and the boys agreed to toe the Choate line. Mr. Kennedy fully supported St. John. “I’ve always been very grateful to him,” St. John later recorded. But as Doris Kearns Goodwin revealed, in the confrontation between father and son, the father turned up trumps — and earned his son’s undying loyalty, for all that would separate them in the years ahead. As the telephone rang and temporarily detained St. John, Mr. Kennedy leaned over and whispered to his son, “If that crazy Muckers Club had been mine, you can be sure it wouldn’t have started with an *M*.” In this moment Jack Kennedy finally came of age — his father his friend, no longer his oppressor.

Jack was put on probation and permitted to remain at Choate, from which he graduated that summer with good enough grades to take him to the Ivy League university of his choice, Princeton, where his Mucker friends Lem Billings, Ralph Horton, and Paul Chase were headed. Prescott Lecky, a psychologist from Columbia University, in a session with Jack after the Muckers scandal, had warned of the psychological trap Jack had made for himself. He had voluntarily assumed within the Kennedy family the role of “thoughtlessness, sloppiness and inefficiency — and he feels entirely at home in that role. . . . A good deal of his trouble is due to comparison with his elder brother,” Lecky noted. (Jack had said, “My brother is the efficient one in the family, and I am the boy that doesn’t get things done. If my brother were not so efficient it would be easier for me to be efficient. He does it so much better than I do.”) “Jack is apparently avoiding comparison and withdraws from the race, so to speak, in order to convince himself that he is not trying.”

However true this was, it missed the real point. As Alice Miller wrote so movingly in *The Drama of the Gifted Child*, narcissistic adults are usually unwilling to look honestly at their own childhood. “Very often they show disdain and irony, even derision and cynicism,” she wrote. “In general there is a complete absence of real emotional understanding or serious appreciation of their own childhood vicissitudes, and no conception of their true needs — beyond the need for achievement. The internalization of the original drama has been so complete that the illusion of a good childhood can be maintained.”

Jack Kennedy never spoke ill of his childhood or his parents or his siblings. He “made do” with what he was given, and after the climax of his anti-authoritarianism at school, he settled down, more or less, to a life of achievement, confident he had the love and understanding at least of his father.

The “drama” of his early childhood, the traumas of the warmthless mother, life-threatening hospitalization, and displacement in his mother’s concern by Rosemary, his retarded sister, followed by six more siblings, was covered up in a precociously witty, brainy child. Such a child, the famous psychologist D. W. Winnicott pointed out, constructs a “pseudo-ego, or head-ego, a kind of emergency construct with which, on the one hand, to comply with the world, which he may despise because he has felt let down by it, or on the other hand, with which to control and manipulate people.”

The damage done in early childhood could not be undone; it would show its scars in Jack Kennedy’s private world all his life. But his father’s intervention ensured a real bond between father and son that would prove immensely important in the years ahead. Those

who claim that Jack Kennedy was merely the callous pawn of an ambitious millionaire father are willfully misunderstanding the nature of that relationship, as well as the personality and talents of Jack Kennedy. Lack of maternal warmth may have damaged Jack Kennedy's ego, psychologically speaking, inhibiting "a healthy body-ego." "He does not feel loved, hence he cannot develop his own capacity for loving" is Rushi Ledermann's description of this narcissistic disorder. But while this may have been true in terms of Jack Kennedy's love life, it was certainly not true of his relations with other men, with whom his sense of fun, of daring, of honesty, and of self-deprecating wit would make him perhaps the most popular politician of the twentieth century.

Choate School, despite the scandal of the Muckers, had at least provided a stable, caring environment, with some brilliant teachers and a moralistic pattern of exhortation, at a critical period in Jack Kennedy's life. "Jack has it in him to be a great leader of men, and somehow I have a feeling that he is going to be just that," Wardell St. John, the assistant headmaster, wrote perceptively in his final report in June 1935. "We shall miss Jack in spite of all our grumbling," George St. John himself added. When Jack Kennedy was murdered, twenty-eight years later, St. John wrote this to his son Seymour, who succeeded him as headmaster:

An hour ago Rose Lee came where I was reading with this: "I am sorry I have bad news for you." She turned on the T.V., and I looked and listened. In a very few minutes last rites were administered, and a priest was first to say, "The President is dead."

However much trouble Jack made us as a boy, however much we may have deprecated his politics, I was nevertheless fond of him. I am grateful that last year I had occasion to tell him so, and that he wrote me a nice letter in return.

He had great and tireless ability. He was a master of dialectic. I feel as Mr. Churchill said he did about the socialist government in England: "I can only hope it will succeed — but not so far as to become permanent."

But life and death are too big for politics — for even convictions about a Republic. I could throw my arms around Jack, bless him, and say an unrestrained good-bye. 🙏