

An Interview of Edmund Reggie

Edmund Reggie was interviewed by student Katelyn LeDoux for a social studies project. Here is the text of that interview.

1. How and when did Judge Edmund Reggie meet Senator John Kennedy?

Answer: I was an official Delegate to the Democratic National Convention held in Chicago for the main purpose of nominating the Democratic candidates for President and Vice President in the forthcoming national election. It was during the summer of 1956. A candidate for Vice President was a friend of mine I was supporting told me that he realized that he could not win and released me from my pledge to support him. Being free to chose anyone I then wanted to support, I heard about a young United States Senator from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts whose name was John F. Kennedy. I sought Senator Kennedy out and meet with him in his room at the Palmer House Hotel in Chicago and told him I wanted to support him and I thought I might be able to get the Louisiana Delegates to the Convention to support him for Vice President. Governor Adlai Stevenson had the nomination for President pretty well sewed up, having run in the previous presidential election against General Dwight D. Eisenhower and lost. We made plans and the Louisiana endorsed him and voted for his candidacy for Vice President. He lost by about 30 electoral votes in the Convention. We both walked out of the Chicago Convention together and we pledged to each other we'd stay in touch.

2. What prompted Senator Kennedy to visit Crowley?

Answer: Following up on our promise to each other to stay in touch, I began to visit him in Washington, D.C. in his senatorial offices, and we became good friends. On one visit to his home in the Georgetown section of Washington I asked him he to come to the International Rice Festival in my hometown of Crowley. He had not yet announced his candidacy for President in the 1960 election, but I urged him to come to meet people in the deepest of the deep south state. He immediately agreed, and from that point I began laying the foundation for his visit.

3. What were some of the details in planning the trip to Crowley, La.?

Answer: Plans for such a visit are difficult and huge. Every detail must be carefully planned and executed. I took on those duties. The biggest issue is the size of the crowd that could be expected at the Rice Festival when he would appear. I did not have to concern myself with his air reservations because he used his own private plane. We publicized his visit on several radio stations and several TV stations. TV was just coming into our area and we used it to promote his visit. In the plans we needed to provide housing for their stay in Crowley, and we had to invite and have suitable space for the TV and newspaper reporters. We also needed to provide place for national news media and magazines as the plans progressed and it was important to Senator Kennedy and his staff that the Crowley visit was going to be huge. Word got out around the country that a big crowd was expected to greet the young senator who had not even announced his candidacy for president until about 78 days after the Festival.

4. What airport did he fly into?

Answer: He and his wife and a few staff members flew into Lafayette Airport aboard his plane named after his recently born daughter, Caroline, where they were greeted with flying airplane signs welcoming them, all the public officials of the area came there and my father-in-law and his wife, Mr and Mrs. Frem Boustany held a luncheon for him at the Oakbourn Country Club in Lafayette and it was attended by several hundred citizens specially invited.

When he left Louisiana, he flew out on his plane from LeGros Airport near Morse in Acadia Parish.

5. Was Secret Service used?

Answer: No, because he was not yet an announced candidate for President and was not eligible for Secret Service protection. I arranged for local police officials to provide physical protection for him and his wife who joined him on the trip.

6. Who decided his itinerary while in Crowley?

Answer: I made that decision in discussions with the President of the International Rice Festival , members of that office, the local police and mayor, and the officials of Acadia Parish and also Lafayette Parish because he would be landing in that Parish and we wanted everything to be well planned and approved by all public bodies. Every minute, minute by minute, was planned from the moment he flew into Lafayette to the moment he flew out of LeGros Airport. Nothing was left to chance.

7. What was his itinerary?

Answer: It included the Lafayette function, the appearance at the Rice Festival on the official stage, the speeches by Mrs. Kennedy and Senator Kennedy, and their ride in the Official Parade in a brand new Cadillac convertible. I might add that the trip from Lafayette to the Festival was led by 6 stunt motorcycle riders from the Louisiana State Police and we were followed with 12 matched white sedan Cadillacs in which rode every candidate who was running for Louisiana Governor at that, plus press and staff. We had to provide for rest and meals. He swam in my swimming pool at 400 West Northern Avenue in Crowley in a borrowed pair of swimming trunks I loaned him. Then there was a reception in honor of Senator and Mrs. Kennedy at my home hosted by my wife, Doris, and myself. About 2,000 guests attended that reception. The crowd was so large it could not be contained in the house and we had to move Senator and Mrs. Kennedy to our front lawn so he would be sure to shake the hand of every person attending the reception.

8. Where did Senator and Mrs. Kennedy stay while in Crowley?

Answer: They stayed at my home and used the bedroom suite usually used by our young daughters.

9. How long did they stay in the area?

Answer: About 24 hours.

10. Did he visit the State Capitol while in Louisiana?

Answer: No. There was simply not enough time for any other activity than the Lafayette and Crowley events.

11. What did he think of the people of Southwest Louisiana?

Answer: They were excited on being greeted by such warm and supportive people. The crowd at the Rice Festival was estimated by the Louisiana State Police at 135,000 people. That was the largest crowd he ever attracted before his nomination for President, and one the largest he spoke to at any time before or after his nomination. Mrs. Kennedy spoke from the Rice Festival stage located in front of the Acadia Parish Court House, to that massive crowd. She spoke in French and told how her father had told her when she was a little girl that Louisiana was like a little corner of France where the French language and culture were preserved. When she spoke her first words in French, the crowd shouted with joy. The crowd was so massive it covered both sides of Parkerson Avenue from the Court House to the railroad tracks, plus all the side streets. We had strung up loud speakers all over that area before the Festival and their appearance, anticipating a large crowd. That way, even those 5 blocks away or more plus anyone in any of the side streets could hear every word spoken from the platform.

12. After he became President of the United States was there still a connection with Crowley and Judge Reggie?

Answer: There remained a strong friendship between Judge Reggie and President Kennedy until the President was killed in Dallas. He appointed me his Emissary to the Middle East and I functioned in that official capacity in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. I had to make my report in writing and orally to the President, and I continued to have a close personal relationship with the president and his family. My daughter Victoria married President Kennedy's brother, Senator Edward "Ted" Kennedy in 1992. They live at his official residence in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. They also own the home of President Kennedy used by him and his family until his and Mrs. Kennedy's death. Our Reggie family plans to spend Christmas with the Senator and Victoria this year, as we have done in the past, no crowds, must our Reggie family and the Senator and Victoria.

Other details?

Answer: The saddest time I went to Washington for a Kennedy event was President Kennedy's funeral. I was at the Capitol standing on the steps with a good friend of mine, Mr. Camille Gravel of Alexandria, Louisiana who went with me to the funeral. As the coffin was being carried up the steps of the Capitol, my eye caught the President's brother's, who was then Attorney General of the United States. He motioned to me slightly to take a position with the family. My friend and I moved inside the Rotunda of the Capitol and stood immediately behind the Kennedy family during the services held there. Following that event, the Capitol was open to the public which came from everywhere to pay last respects to the slain President, and they walked in line for about 20 hours, in a continuous stream of people who came to say farewell to their assassinated President.

On every visit my wife and I make to Washington, D.C., we visit his grave in Arlington Cemetery which was originally the home of the George Washington's Custis family and later the family of Civil War General Robert E. Lee. There a flame (fed by natural gas) comes out of the ground and burns day and night, in snow and wind and rain. It burns as constant reminder of President Kennedy's extraordinary short term as Chief Executive of our nation who was murdered on the street in Dallas, Texas. He was and remains the youngest person to have served as President of the United States, having been elected at age 42. All Americans look upon President Kennedy as a special hero of our nation, and he is honored all over the world by streets and buildings and bridges and other structures named for President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

