NOEL CLARK

At White House conference Editor Wade Nichols of Good Housekeeping shakes hands with President Kennedy. Cosmopolitan's Robert Atherton (center) and Good Housekeeping's Ray Robinson look on.

PRESIDENT KENNEDY TALKS ABOUT YOU, YOUR CHILDREN AND PEACE

■ What can the average woman do about her yearning for a peaceful world?

Does it serve any worthwhile purpose for women to spend their energies by enlisting in various "peace" groups?

How are children affected by the perpetuation of the cold war?

Such questions are the gnawing concern of millions of American women, who, with their families, live today in an uneasy world faced with the prospect of total extinction.

One day last summer the President of the United States pondered and answered these, and similar questions, in an historic sixty-minute White House press conference with the editors of seven of the country's most prominent women's magazines.

"I have not done an interview of this type before," said President Kennedy, "with the exception of the interview with Mr. Adzhubei of the Soviet *continued on page 176*

BY RAY ROBINSON, ARTICLES EDITOR, GOOD HOUSEKEEPING

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Union. But I am glad to do it on this occasion because I think the matter is of sufficient importance."

The Friday of the conference, June 14, 1963, was a rather sunless, muggy, eighty-degree day in Washington, D.C. Earlier in the same afternoon the President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, had faced and pointedly answered the questions of a group of Negro demonstrators. Now, in the calm of the Cabinet Room at the White House, sitting behind a table that had been presented to President Franklin D. Roosevelt by one-time Secretary of Commerce Jesse Jones, President Kennedy focused on the other most momentous problem of his time and his administration: peace, how to achieve it and how each of us can work for it.

Deeply tanned, the President, dressed neatly in a blue suit, white shirt and blue and red tie, led the informal give-and-take in a relaxed, congenial manner, from a broad-backed, black leather chair. While he spoke and listened intently to his questioners, the President doodled restlessly with a pencil on a bulging white pad in front of him. Portraits of Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson and James Monroe stared down mutely at the proceedings, and a bust of Abraham Lincoln reminded the President's guests of another equally critical period in American history.

ONLY a few days before the President had enunciated, at Washington's American University, his hopes for a concerted "strategy of peace," which might enable a bomb-haunted world to break the vicious cycle of the cold war. (In July, of course, the Moscow test-ban accord, though hardly assuring peace, promised, at least, an easing of tensions, and was, according to the President, "a shaft of light in the darkness.")

It was the articulation of such a philosophy, plus the growing demands of many of their thirty-three million women readers, that had brought this assemblage of editors to the White House.

"The world has long since passed the time when armed conflict can be the solution to international problems," the President had said in a message to Premier Khrushchev.

To the editors the President stated: "We cannot count on a balance of terror forever. As arms pile up, as nuclear weapons spread to new countries, as the tension produced by the increasing destructive power of armaments grows, as the consequences of accident or error become more incalculable, the urgency of disarmament and arms control increases."

Now these editors had come to Washington to hear, from the President's own mouth, how his hopes and aspirations—and theirs—might in any way be implemented by the deeds of their readers: the women of America.

* * *

In the last few years, if there is any single subject that the editors of women's magazines can probably agree on it is that their readers have shown an increasing awareness and sophistication about the problems of peace and the threat of mutual incineration. This concern has been manifested by a deluge of mail and phone calls and a thoughtful response to articles, many of them complex, dealing with the theme. The nature of this mass anxiety was the first question brought to the President's attention.

He answered:

"I think there is a basic concern which any woman has for her family—her husband and her children. Most women are concerned that war has been the constant companion of history and, unfortunately, there have been many more years of war than of peace. (EDITOR'S NOTE: In over 3,600 years of recorded history, less than 300 years have been devoid of conflict.)

"Women recognize that there are two great factors which affect life today. One is the hostility between the communist system and the free world. Combined with that is the development of these new weapons which can wipe out so much of life in so brief a period of time.

"A bombing of the United States, the Soviet Union and Europe could probably kill 300 million people, and with the radioactivity which would be loosed you would have an effect on a good many generations to come.

"Women are conscious of this. They worry about their families and I think they are quite right to worry."

Confronted with the practical possibility that the world, as they know it, might disappear after a catastrophic nuclear exchange, women have been asking the inevitable questions. What can they do personally about preventing such unthinkable devastation? What effect does the omnipresent threat of nuclear disaster have on their little boys and girls?

Searching for their constructive role in a divided world, many American women in recent years have taken to mass protests, to joining peace organizations, to persistent pleas for disarmament, to letter writing.

PRESIDENT Kennedy was asked: Do you find that these protests, these movements, are a positive thing in the quest for peace? Or are they a source of embarrassment to your administration?

The President was most emphatic in denying the futility of such mass causes. "A lot depends on how they work," he answered. "Some women work effectively and some do not. Some work in ways which make our task easier and some work in ways which I think would not make a great public contribution.

"Some women's groups work to strengthen the United Nations. When we had the whole question of UN bonds, it looked as if we would be bankrupt and have to collapse our efforts in the Congo. When the United Nations was under attack some of these groups were much in favor of the UN. A good example was Mrs. Roosevelt and her people in the UN. There were many other

groups which worked to support the UN, and brought their influence to bear.

"There are others who worked to sustain and support foreign aid, freedom-from-hunger campaigns and foreign assistance. These efforts are all good. Some are more controversial than others, but I think they are probably very good, too."

Is it true that there is pressure against many of these groups?

"There is an awful lot of weight against our efforts to get disarmament and to ban nuclear tests, against freer trade, against the Peace Corps—at least at the beginning. There are some powerful groups and interests and some people, all very strong patriots, who believe in policies which I think could end up in disaster," remarked the President.

"The women's groups are very valuable," he continued. "They help to balance off that pressure. So I would urge them to get into whatever group they feel reflects their judgment as to how things ought to be done. But certainly they ought to work."

IT WAS pointed out by one questioner that oftentimes women who voluntarily give their time and attention to these causes are subjected to humiliation and attack. For instance, didn't the House Un-American Activities Committee inquiry of Women's Strike for Peace act as a deterrent for many women with a heartfelt desire to participate in similar movements?

"There may have been some things about the Women's Strike for Peace that I would not endorse," answered the President, "and there may be some people whose judgment I might think unwise. But they just have to put up with it. If there were no struggle there would be no need for activity. Everyone gets some abuse at one time or another.

"Of course, there are quieter groups to work in. They are not spectacular but they do a good job, too."

The President was reminded that in addition to the abuse, women often were overcome with a feeling of frustration in their efforts to do anything at all about the problems of peace. How could this feeling of frustration be overcome? How could a woman do something more than simply wring her hands in a gesture of apathy and despair?

"The *first* thing is to be informed," said the President.

"If you are going to write a congressman or senator, you have to know something about the subject. You have to have some detailed information on what you are writing about. The question is really what are the details of specific steps to take to advance peace."

Are letters effective instruments?

"I have talked to many congressmen that I asked to vote for a particular proposal who were doubtful about the proposal because they tell me they have only eight, ten or fifteen letters. People do not get many letters which are not part of an organized drive. Citizens' letters, thus, have a real impact. I just saw some senators introduce a resolution on a form of nuclear test ban. Some of them were previously against test bans. Therefore, they feel they are responding to some desire on the part of their constituency. So people still run the country."

For many women the threat of seeing their homes and country destroyed is equal only to the impact that the cold war has on the minds and hearts of their youngsters. Many fear that children are being exposed needlessly to fears, anxieties and tensions that could have an adverse effect on their mental health and well-being.

The President did not agree that this was an important problem. He felt, as a matter of fact, that the problem had been "overstated."

"The amount of civil-defense activity in any child's life," he said, "is quite limited. In fact there is probably not enough of it, so I do not think it has a measurable effect upon very many children. Secondly, I think children live a good deal of their lives devoted to competition and peaceful—although not always so peaceful—combat. I do not think the cold war has made life, in their minds, more insecure. War has always been a specter even when it was much less potentially devastating than it is today. But I think it probably requires more understanding than most children have to realize the real dangers. This is a rather peaceful country—at least it was until recently—and I would say that the struggles which go on are still quite distant, fortunately, from most of our children."

Was there the chance that by reshaping and remolding our children's games and toys, away from the ennobling of war and war heroes, we might make war, for future generations, less likely? Wouldn't it be better to promote scientists, writers, educators and statesmen as heroes, rather than military men?

"I think," answered President Kennedy, "that we ought to take some of the groups you suggest and give them the credit that is due to any creative figure. I don't know whether the struggle that is involved in producing weapons in the last number of years makes

us more susceptible to combat. I suppose it could, but I think we should fight against that. There are a good many instincts implanted in us growing out of the dust. But human nature can be rational and I think people do look at the alternatives—war is too expensive, it may not be successful, and so on."

Would it be advisable for women to continue to support, and more strongly, if possible, the United Nations?

"I think it is very desirable," said the President, in concluding the meeting with the editors. "We are living now in a very disturbed world, and the UN is not organized to settle all matters, but it provides a buffer in critical moments between the struggle and the escalation. So I hope we continue to support it.

"I support it strongly." ◆

Following the special press conference with the editors of the women's magazines, President Kennedy issued the following statement about women and their role in the continuing struggle for peace:

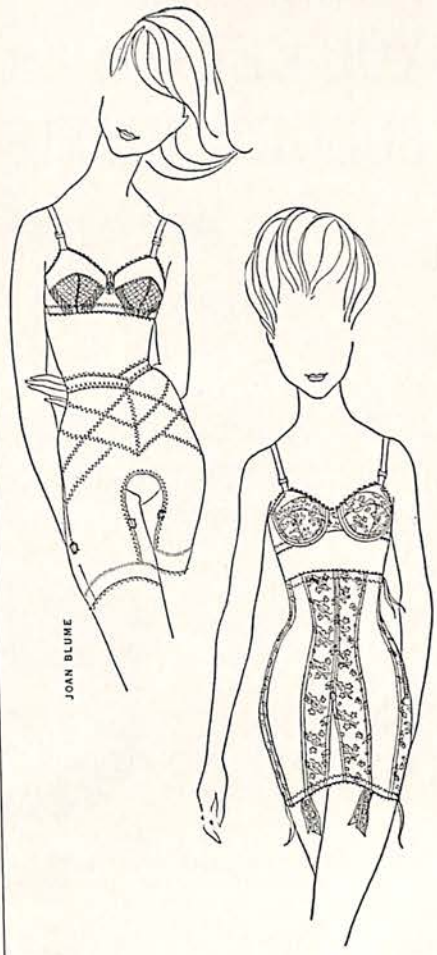
I have been asked how women can best translate their concern into effective participation toward preserving peace. As a first step, there is no substitute for information. While the issues may be complex, they are not beyond the understanding of any intelligent person who takes the time to study them. Understanding does not require either a military background or access to top secret documents. The best sources of information are your own Congressman or the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency in Washington.

It is important, too, to encourage the widest possible discussion of arms control and disarmament questions —in church groups, in parent-teacher associations, in women's organizations of all kinds. You can contribute to the cause of peace by stimulating these groups to discuss the issues involved and to express their views.

Finally, you can contribute most directly—and in the best democratic tradition—by writing to your Representative and Senators when a specific issue bearing on peace is up for debate and decision. Nothing is more effective than a letter that reflects both an understanding of the question involved and a sincere expression of a personal viewpoint based on that understanding.

I have said that control of arms is a mission that we undertake particularly for our children and our grandchildren, and that they have no lobby in Washington. No one is better qualified to represent their interests than the mothers and grandmothers of America.

John F. Kennedy



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■ Cotton broadcloth bra (top) has elasticized insets of nylon, rayon and Lycra spandex. White. Sizes 32-36 A; 32-40 B, C, D. A, B, C, about $2.50; D about $3.50. Panty girdle of nylon and Lycra spandex has crisscross tummy, thigh control; acetate, cotton and Lycra spandex satin-back stretch panel. White, black. Proportioned sizes P, S, M, L, about $13; XL, about $14. Bottom: nylon and rayon lace underwired bra, one-piece stretch sides and back of acetate and Lycra spandex. White. Sizes 32-40 B; 32-42 C, D. B, C about $5; D about $6. Boned high-waisted girdle has nylon and rayon lace front and side panels, nylon-marquisette-lined. Stretch leno panels of acetate, Dacron polyester and Lycra spandex. White. Sizes 25-36, about $15. All by Gossard. ◆