



THE WIDOWED ETHEL: NO SELF-PITY

ETHEL KENNEDY: 'A WOMAN OF GREAT CHARACTER'

By BILL HENDRICKS
Of the Tattler Staff

The tragedy of the assassination of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy revealed his widow as a woman of much more substance than many had imagined.

In the six years since her husband was murdered, Ethel Kennedy has carried on her life under difficult circumstances with exemplary dignity.

She has been reported as romantically involved with a number of men - from tennis pro Don Hamilton to Frank Sinatra. But even the most sensational publications have failed to tarnish her with scandal.

From the first moments after her husband of 18 years fell fatally wounded on the night of June 5, 1968, Ethel Kennedy behaved with courage.

THOSE WHO RODE the train carrying the slain Kennedy's body from New York to Washington, remember his widow moving down the aisle the entire length of the 20-car train to personally thank them for being there.

If there were some who were amazed at her ability to withstand the torture of those first few days it was because to them Ethel Kennedy had seemed somewhat frivolous.

They might have expected more had they reflected on her past, for the former Ethel Skakel had endured other personal tragedies. In the 1950s her parents were killed in an airplane accident, and her brother met the same fate in 1966.

The truth is that Ethel Kennedy has always relied heavily on her Roman Catholic faith in times of trial.

This was never more evident than in the first few months after

her husband's death.

A FRIEND RECALLS walking with Mrs. Kennedy on the grounds of the Kennedy family compound at Hyannisport, Mass. The friend told Mrs. Kennedy that the weather had been gloomy earlier in the year.

"But this month the weather really turned sunny and warm," Mrs. Kennedy replied. "Up there in heaven, Bobby must have told God that he had to do better."

The remark was typical of Mrs. Kennedy in that it not only reflected her religious faith but demonstrated her resolve not to indulge in self-pity.

SHE HAD TO MANAGE other difficulties without a husband's support. Two of her 11 children have gotten into serious trouble with authorities since their father died.

But somehow despite all the rumors and innuendos, Ethel Kennedy has retained her reputation as a woman of great character.

She most recently recalled the memory of her dead husband when she spoke to some 325 journalists and friends at the Washington Kennedy Center.

In a poignant statement to the gathering for the sixth annual presentation of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Journalism Awards, Mrs. Kennedy thanked CBS reporter Roger Mudd, who chaired the session.

"I would like to add one personal one," she said, as she broke down in tears at the thought of the tragedy in Los Angeles.

"It was because of Roger, who led me through the crowd, that Bobby and I got to say goodbye to each other."

In Bobby's Case, Two Who Came Forward as Witnesses Died of Unnatural Causes

Mystery Deaths Link Both Kennedy Killings

One parallel between the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy and his brother, Sen. Robert Kennedy, can be found in the mysterious deaths of several people connected with either investigations.

Since President Kennedy was gunned down on the streets of Dallas, Nov. 22, 1963, scores of persons connected with the case have died in circumstances that cannot be described as normal. Authorities have generally written three deaths off as strange coincidences.

In less than a year after Bobby Kennedy was killed in the Ambassador Hotel, June 5, 1968, two persons who came forward as witnesses in the case died violently - their deaths officially determined to be suicides.

In Dallas, John Kennedy's suspected assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was murdered while in the custody of a veritable regiment of police officers, removing virtually forever the chance of the full truth behind the assassination being ascertained.

In Los Angeles, Bobby Kennedy's accused killer, Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, received numerous death threats, prompting authorities to place him in the strictest, most isolated security in modern history, to prevent "another Dallas."

LESS THAN ONE MONTH after Bobby Kennedy was assassinated, a sniper made an attempt on the life of Saidallah Sirhan, Sirhan Sirhan's oldest brother.

But two persons who came forward as witnesses in the Robert Kennedy assassination probe met unnatural deaths.

One was Crispin Gonzalez, only 17 years old, who was found hanging in his jail cell in July 1968 in Juarez, Mexico, across the border from El Paso, Tex.

Gonzalez had told police he was once involved in a conversation in a Santa Monica, Calif., library with Sirhan Sirhan concerning the fear that, as Gonzalez put it, "the Kennedys were gaining dictatorial powers."

Gonzalez was later arrested in Juarez and placed under psychiatric observation after a passerby found and read a letter the teenager had dropped.

In the letter, Gonzalez claimed he had been an accomplice in the Bobby Kennedy assassination.

Mexican authorities said they didn't believe

the youth's story. They wrote it off as a "fantastic desire for publicity" on the part of Gonzalez.

The FBI in El Paso, however, acknowledged it was in fact investigating the boy's claims. Then the youth was found dead, an apparent suicide. Nothing more was said about the investigation.

ON APRIL 11, 1969, 10 months after Bobby Kennedy was killed, a pretty belly dancer who believed she was the "young woman in the polka-dot dress" sought by police after the assassination was found dead.

She checked into a motel with instructions that she be called at 5:30 p.m. When she didn't answer the call, the motel manager investigated and found her in a coma.

The girl, Kathy Fulmer, 19, died later of an apparent overdose of Seconal, a powerful sedative.

On the mirror of the wall of her room, she had scrawled: "Lord you gave me a mountain... I am love to climb... Someday... A wooden box will do."

An "All-points Bulletin" went out over police teletype networks after Kennedy was shot for a "young woman in a polka-dot dress" whom, a Kennedy worker said, ran from the hotel after the crime, screaming, "We shot him! We shot him!"

"We shot him! We shot him!"

MISS FULMER SHOWED UP two days later at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Dept. and said she was the girl being sought.

But she said she had shouted, "They shot him" not "We shot him." She said she did not know Sirhan Sirhan but had seen him before the crime near the Ambassador hallway where Kennedy was shot.

She had been near the Senator when he was shot, she said, and had run from the building after the shooting erupted.

Miss Fulmer said she was active in the



VALERIE SCHULTE, above, was one of several women thought to be "the girl in the polka-dot dress" for whom police broadcast a lookout just after the Los Angeles crime. But Booker Griffin, right, who saw such a girl, said she walked with a crutch and was decidedly not Valerie Schulte



Kennedy campaign and had gone to the Ambassador with two companions - a man and a woman - to watch the Senator speak.

Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess released Miss Fulmer without a charge after hearing her story. Two other women questioned as being possibly the "girl in the polka-dot dress" were also questioned and released.

NOBODY HEARD ANY MORE about Kathy Fulmer - until she was found dying in a motel room with those strange words scribbled on a mirror.

Police withdrew their search for the polka-dot mystery girl when Sandy Serrano, a

volunteer campaign worker, told police she was overwrought and imagined she had seen the polka-dot dress girl.

However, two other witnesses saw the polka-dot dress girl, Hotel waiter Vincent DiPietro said that both this girl and Sirhan were smiling at the time of the shooting.

DiPietro said Sirhan had "a very sick smile on his face" when he opened fire. Booker Griffin, a union leader, also reported seeing the girl in the polka-dot dress. He described her as a "weird cat."

Booker Griffin said he cannot possibly accept Valerie Schulte as the girl he saw run away from the scene of the crime.