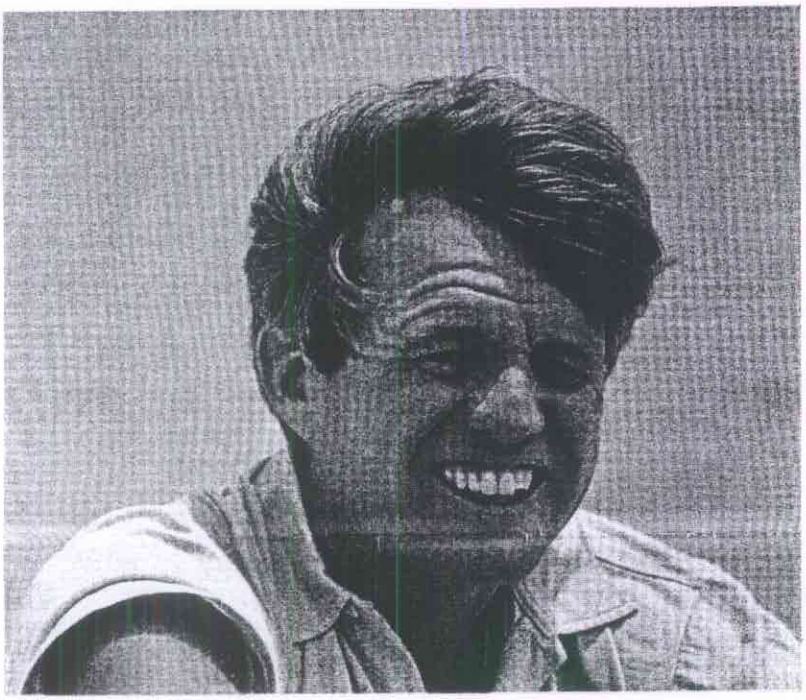
Sat Eve Post 8/26/67

ROBERT F. KENNEDY

At home with the heir apparent



Many Americans are convinced that he will become President someday, but he is not so sure. Here the senator talks informally about his future plans, the younger generation and what he wants for his own children.

By Robert S. Bird

Photographs by Philippe Halsman

It was early on a grand morning at Hickory Hill, Robert Kennedy's house in Virginia, and the senator was not long out of bed. His hair was uncombed, shaggy as a yak's. He had pulled on a faded, blue-striped jersey and an old pair of khaki shorts for the stroll down the lawn to the pool, and he looked at least 10 years younger than his actual 41 years. He seemed lost in thought, his shoulders a little hunched, his blue eyes caught by some inner vision. Seeing him like this, it was hard to believe that uncounted multitudes, including not only his admirers but also many who dislike him, have long tended to think of him as a future President of the United States. Not just as a favored candidate but as an *actual, de facto, future President.* This is an unprecedented position in American political history. In the case of Bobby Kennedy it is, of course, a direct reflection of the power of dynasty, a power which the Kennedy family has been able to build up, maintain and enhance in the span of just two generations.

Arriving a little earlier than the hour appointed for our meeting, I had found the Kennedy home in the same state of morning uproar that prevails in thousands of other American households with 10 youngsters. One of the older Kennedy children whizzed out the front door with a school bag just as I was approaching. Since he left the door wide open, I simply walked in and announced myself. A maid seemed to be directing traffic at the foot of the stairs in the main hall, steering the unfed ones in to breakfast and pointing the fed ones toward the door. To me she said a pleasant good morning and explained, "The senator just this very minute went on down to the pool. You go out that door and down the hill and you'll find him there."

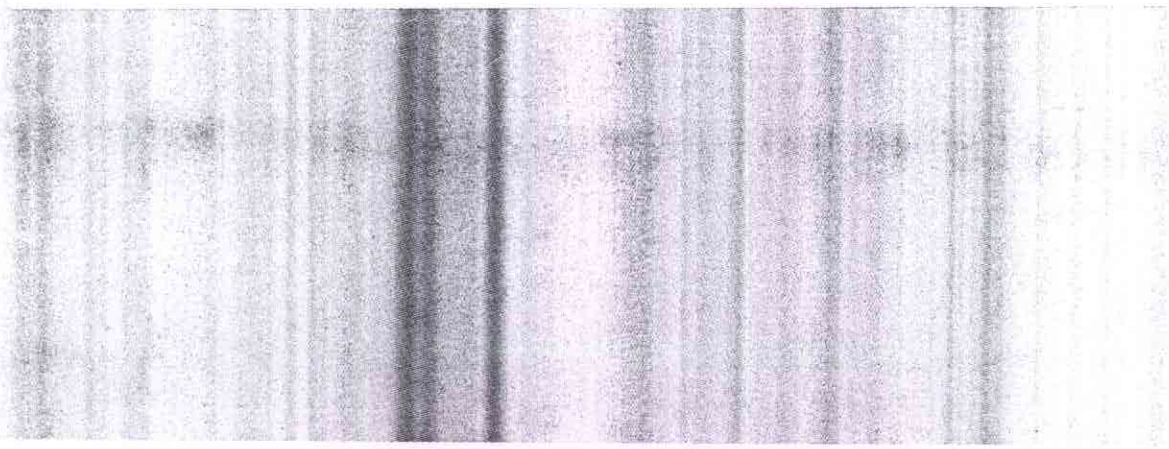
A ragamuffin tot, wearing a tiny bathrobe, came up to me and asked, "Are you the man who's going to fix the cars?" I said no, and hurried out.

Whatever the senator's thoughts may have been, they vanished when he caught sight of this visitor approaching. He called out a friendly "Hi!" in that familiar flat accent of his, and waved an invitation to join him across the pool. "I'll be with you in a minute," he said, and ducked into the cabana. A couple of minutes later he emerged in khaki trunks and promptly lowered himself into the water. I asked him if it was cold. He said, "No, it's fine. I began my morning swims back in March and I had to heat the water up a little then because it *was* pretty cold."

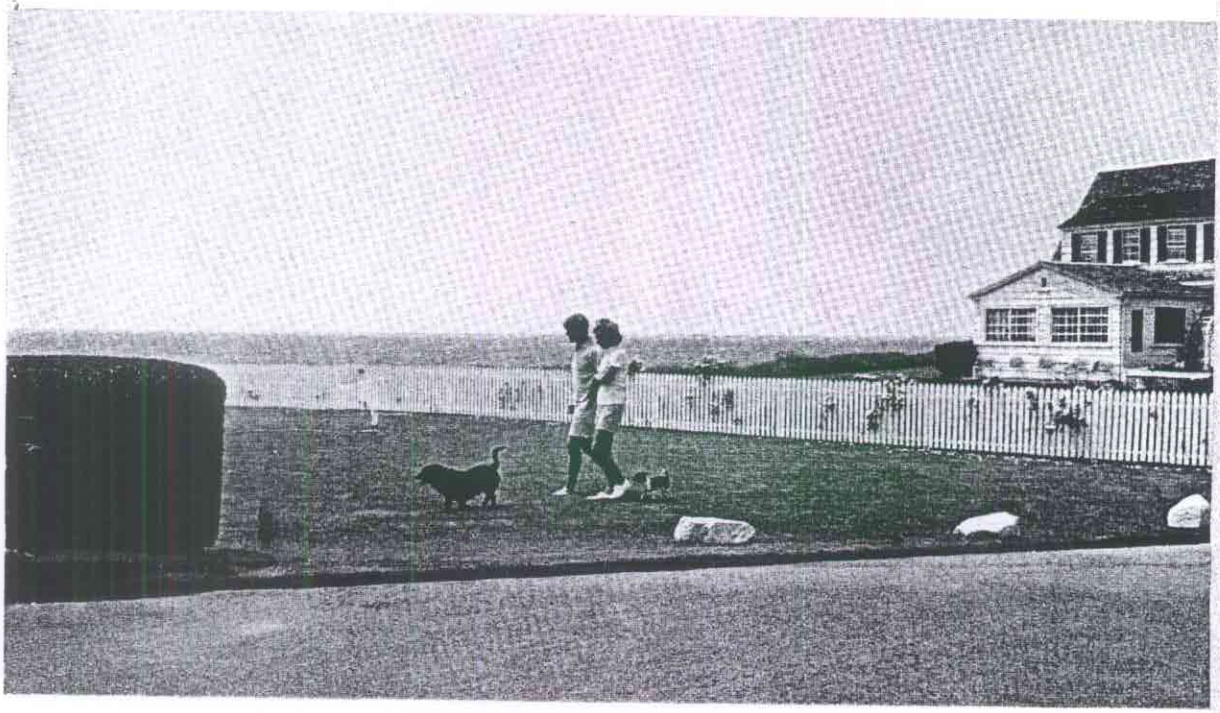
He swam around for five minutes or so, mostly on his back, and I discovered to my surprise that the rather thick mat of hair on his chest is almost completely gray. While he was enjoying himself in the water, I made another surprising discovery. From the many stories I had read about the Kennedy swimming pool, I had tended to think of it as belonging to grown-ups—a fun place for dunking famous people wearing full evening dress on summer nights of champagne, laughter and moonlight. But now I saw that it was designed primarily for the kids. The most attractive nook in the whole complex was a kind of sheltered patio between two cabana structures at the side of the pool. It contained a great round conference table surrounded by a half dozen chairs upholstered in a gay yellow fabric. But the size of the chairs showed that this was a meeting place for children, not for senators, Harvard professors, or the like.

I remarked to the senator when he pulled himself out of the water that I was surprised to see that, society gossip columns to the contrary notwithstanding, the Kennedy pool was really for the youngsters. He grinned. "That's because we grown-ups are outnumbered."

(The accent on youth—and the sense of dynasty—are, of course, even more pronounced at the



Sen. and Mrs. Kennedy, accompanied by dogs but, for a change, not children, stroll across lawn toward beach. House in background is outside the "Kennedy compound."



Kennedy summer house in Hyannis Port, Mass., where the family moved shortly after my visit to Hickory Hill. On the Cape, moreover, Bobby has much more time to enjoy being a father, because he is away from his senate office, and from the Senate itself. Like his late brother Jack, he spends long hours on the beach—sometimes alone, sometimes with one or more of his children—or in the water or sailing on it. And the inevitable touch-football games, which involve all the children except five-month-old Douglas—along with any visiting friends who can stand the pace—are as strenuous as they ever were in President Kennedy's day.)

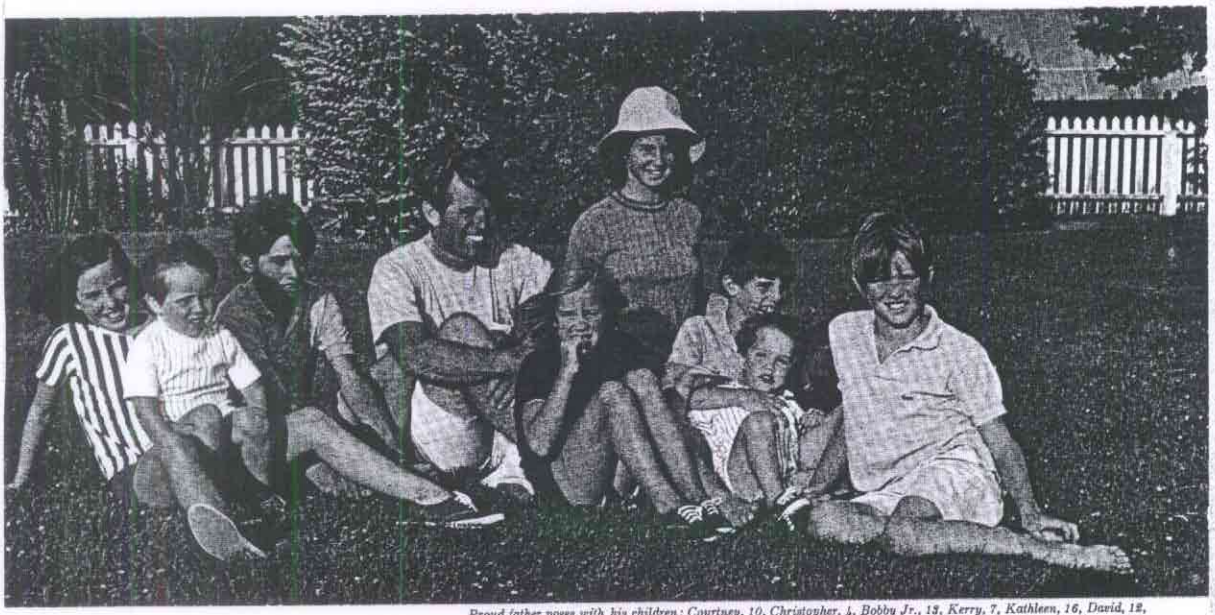
When the senator had changed into the old faded jersey and shorts again, we climbed back up to Hickory Hill. There he suggested we have breakfast on a coffee table in the library.

The older children had all left for school, but two very small toddlers were all over the place. We had hardly settled ourselves when a loud wailing "Da-a-a-a-dy!" resounded outside the open library door, and in toddled the second youngest of the

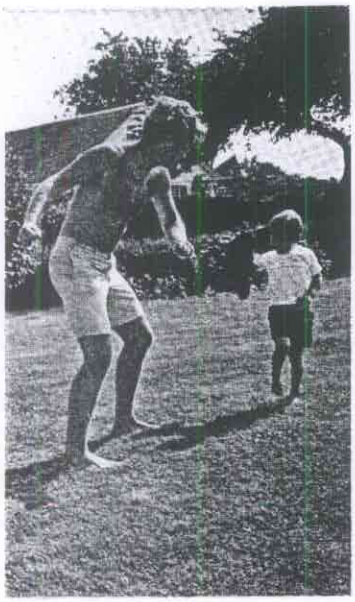
Holding baby Douglas, R.F.K. cracked, "Look as though you're enjoying it; it will be good for me politically."

Kennedy children. The senator addressed the youngster in the razor-sharp voice of a drill instructor of Marines addressing a boot on Parris Island. "Matthew! Maxwell! Taylor! Kennedee-e!" he boomed. "What, Daddy?" the child asked sweetly, trying to reach his arms to Daddy across the coffee table. The senator boomed again. "Stand up! I want to introduce you!" With a proud grin, he did so. The child looked up at me, and put out his tiny right hand for a handshake. I squeezed it, acknowledged the introduction, and looked at the beaming face of the senator. "Matthew! Say how old you are!" "You mean on my *next* birthday?" little Matthew shot back. "Yes, on your next birthday." "Three." "Show with your fingers how old you will be!" Little Matthew was having the time of his life. He put up his right hand, watched his first finger go up, then his second finger, and finally his third. He held them there very still, for inspection and approval. "That's right," the senator said. And he helped Matthew across the coffee table for a hug and kiss. Next he explained to Matthew—and to little Christopher, not quite 4 years old, who had also come into the library now—that he was about to go into serious conference with this visitor, so why

'I am not going to be Vice President under any circumstances.'



Proud father poses with his children: Courtney, 10, Christopher, 4, Bobby Jr., 13, Kerry, 7, Kathleen, 16, David, 12, Matthew, 2, and Michael, 9. Two are missing—the baby, having his lunch, and Joe, 14, in Maine for the summer.



Christopher, who has just snatched Daddy's shirt, gets set for a roughhouse—typical Kennedy fun—on the lawn.

didn't they go on upstairs and play? Then the senator added a characteristic touch. During the next couple of hours I must have heard him say it a dozen times. "OK?" he asked them. "Yes, Daddy!" they called from the stairs.

Now we were alone in the library, an airy, sunny, colorful room, with upholstered furniture, a number of framed family snapshots, and shelves of books running from floor to ceiling on one side—mostly contemporary nonfiction works. The senator had some idea about the kind of questions I had in mind because I had spoken to him briefly on the subject a couple of weeks before. So I don't think he was surprised when I now asked him a question which by actual word count turned out to be a blockbuster 452 words long, concerning several of the more interesting theories generally held about him, or attributed to him.

He listened to every word intently, and when I finished he said, "Let's move into the dining room where we can spread out." When we were settled at the dining-room table, the senator without further prompting replied to my marathon question with a 13-word answer. "I don't think, unfortunately, I'm very good at answering these kinds of questions," he said pleasantly. I began again, trying for a little at a time. I chiefly wanted answers to some of the political questions which always must be asked of Bobby Kennedy. For example, most Americans—whether they like him or not—are convinced that Senator Kennedy has a deep wish to carry on that impalpable, soaring *something* which all Kennedy supporters now believe was embodied in the Administration of President John F. Kennedy. They may think of this something as a specific program or promise, or as an implied new pathway for this nation; at any rate, it is felt as something transcending anything in past American political life.

A couple of weeks before, William vanden Heuvel, one of the senator's advisers, had told me, "Anyone who has gone to the President's grave at Arlington with Robert Kennedy—although never a word is spoken—gets the sense that he feels that something great was broken here, and that as his brother's brother he has an obligation to continue it."

Does Bobby Kennedy feel he must carry on this something? I asked. He was still dressed in those swimming-pool togs, and his hair was damp and tangled. But he was leaning forward now, and he was listening carefully with his intent and extremely intelligent eyes. Actually that is the feeling you get—that those blue eyes are also ears. And he was nodding his head slowly—yes, yes, yes. He didn't say it in words, but he seemed to be saying so with his heart: He *does* want to carry on his brother's work. But how?

A theory that has been widely discussed among political insiders in recent months holds that President Johnson might next year decide to make a deal with Robert Kennedy. The idea behind this is that there are two wings of the disorganized Democratic Party today, the Johnson wing and the Kennedy wing. This split exists against a background of drastic changes occurring in the whole broad arena of American politics—among others, the passing of the old-time political bosses, the rise of hordes of young people to voting age, the new political power of the Negroes and the serious divisions in the country over the Vietnam war.

Hard-headed politicians have noted that Hubert Humphrey's influence has waned among the liberal elements while Kennedy's has grown, and that Kennedy's appeal to the young voters—the "jumpers and squealers" as some politicians call them—has risen enormously. For this and other reasons there is talk that, in the pre-convention weeks of 1968, President Johnson may find himself in a position where he seems to be facing defeat unless he dumps Vice President Humphrey, whom he has already pledged to keep as his running mate, and offers the place to Senator Kennedy instead. This switch, according to the theory, might assure President Johnson's reelection in an otherwise doomed situation, because it would unite the two wings of the party.

I mentioned the outlines of this theory to Senator Kennedy. His answer was instantaneous. "No," he said intensely. "First, I don't think he [President Johnson] will be in that mood, and I would think it very peculiar if he was; and unfair, and a betrayal of Hubert Humphrey, who has carried the burden all the way through."

"It would be a double-cross?"

"Yes, and secondly, I am not going to be Vice President under any circumstances. I am satisfied where I am, and so I am not going to take it under any circumstances. And I don't think he would offer it to me under any circumstances."

In the next two days a Johnson intimate and a Kennedy staff man both made approximately the same comment about this statement: "That's what he would say anyway, of course." But somehow I think the senator meant it.

I then asked Kennedy if it was also true that he would not under any circumstances challenge President Johnson "head on" in 1968. "That's right," he shot back. "So," I pressed on, "that would leave only the possibility that President Johnson's health, or something else, should cause him to take himself out of the running?" The senator nodded. What about 1972, then?

"I don't think I can plan for it," he said. "It would be foolish. I don't even know if I'm going to be here." This feeling of fatalism is very much a part of him these days. "I think you affect in a very adverse fashion your ability to cope with present problems if you try to govern yourself by thinking of problems too far in the future. I don't have any long-range strategy—but I think everybody's going to go on thinking I do."

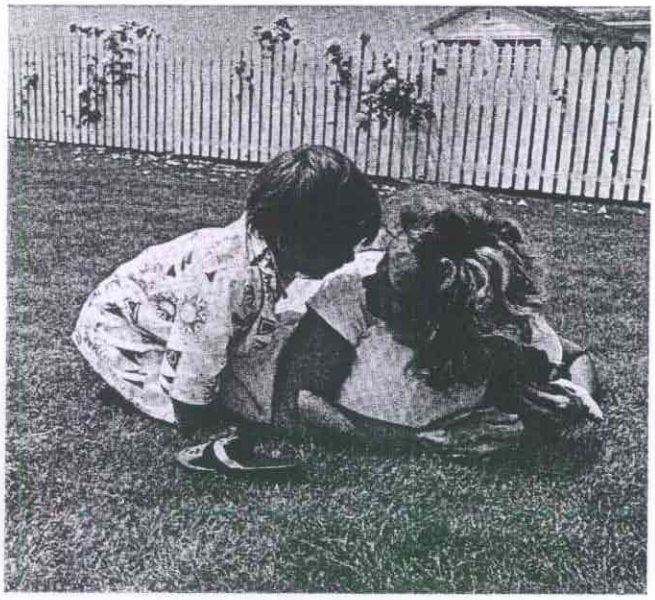
Suddenly Christopher and Matthew Maxwell Taylor Kennedy came crowding into the room. "D-a-a-d-e-e!" Matthew was yelling, "make me a paper airplane like you made for Christopher, please!" He had a sheet of paper in his hand and he pushed it at Daddy. The senator directed him to watch carefully how it was folded so he could do it himself the next time.

"But as you see things now," I went on, "you will definitely run for reelection as senator in 1970?" "Yes."

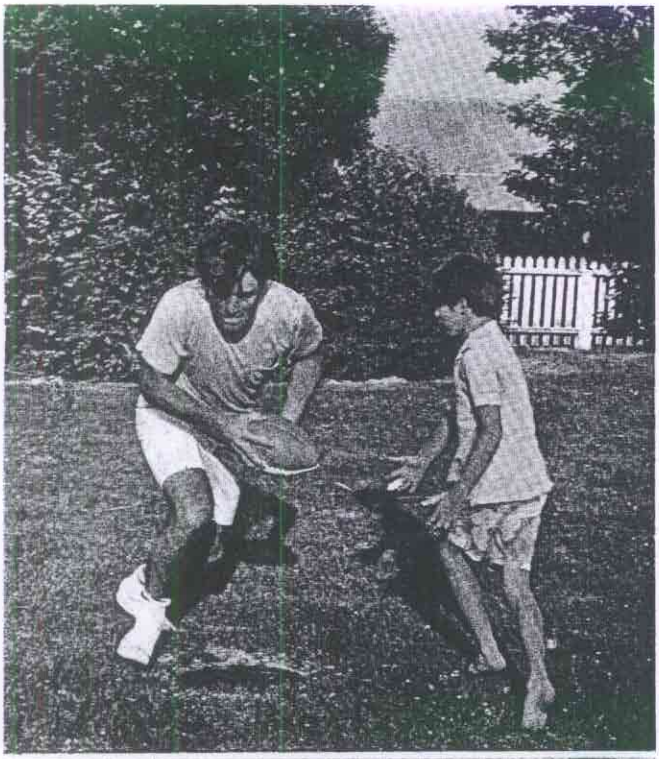
The senator folded the paper, creased it carefully and lined it up for proper aerodynamic balance. Matthew reached for it eagerly, but Daddy took careful aim and launched the plane. We all watched it sail the length of the dining room and out the door. The kids screamed with delight and ran after it.

The senator looked at me with a grin, curious to see how I was taking life with father at Hickory Hill. This man—who can drop a glacial curtain over his eyes so fast you can almost hear it fall, who can clam up tight in front of an eagerly

While Ethel spoons a meal into Douglas Harriman Kennedy, Kathleen pops in to report on personal news—the town's new discothèque, a dance she had been to—and Matthew stands by to get a word in edgewise when he can.



Young Matthew finds Mom resting on a sail bag, in time to impart a confidence before she leaves to board the boat.



waiting audience, who can seem to be hardly even one-dimensional when he chooses to withdraw from people around him—was, with his children, a totally three-dimensional paterfamilias figure.

The sun was streaming in the windows of this cheerful hilltop dining room, whose principal decorations are Francetti portraits of the Kennedy children. These appealing pastels were done by Mme. Francetti over a period of years, and some of the bright-eyed youngsters are now grown into adolescence. The effect here, as everywhere in Kennedy family precincts, was to give the children a preeminent place in the Kennedy milieu—which is to say, the Kennedy dynasty.

With quiet restored, I brought up a little-noticed speech which the senator had made before the Americans for Democratic Action in Philadelphia on February 24. It was a moving address on the frustrated plight of the ordinary individual in this country and elsewhere in the world today, and on the emotional withdrawal of a very large segment of the younger generation from the confused and senseless world they have inherited. Reprints of this speech have become what Kennedy office-staff people call an "underground" circular—hundreds of requests for copies have come as a result of word-of-mouth communication on campuses all over America. I asked Kennedy to explain for me now the reasons for this malaise of our young people.

"I think," he began, "it probably comes down basically to this: That life is very difficult for an individual, with the tremendous changes that have been made in this country and in society and in science, engineering, politics; all the tremendous changes that have taken place over twenty years—in the population growth, and the growth of our cities. The complexity of these problems is such that you don't feel you are a member of any kind of a community. That's the reason, at least in part, why we have violence in the cities and in the suburbs and why we have the young people reacting the way they do—in demonstrations, lying down in front of cars, lying down in front of railroads, walking out of meetings, and at times when they are advocating free speech, joining to prevent someone they disagree with from being permitted to speak. Or they are rude by walking out of a meeting for the Vice President of the United States. They come to the meetings, then walk out."

The senator was talking now with a quite uncharacteristic flow of thoughts and words, more as if he were thinking aloud than answering a specific question. He continued, "It is an effort today, in trying to manifest the importance of the individual, to show that the individual *does* count in a society where he actually appears to count less and less. Many of our young people—and older people as well—feel that they really have no control over what happens in government, and what happens in their country, and in their world—a world that we now have the ability to destroy, along with all mankind, through the use of atomic weapons. The individual feels he has no role to play. He can't affect the situation. I don't think it's a question of just Vietnam, but when these young people see hunger and poverty and discrimination, and when they see other countries which are having a difficult time while we have tremendous wealth here in the United States—then it seems unjust, and they would like to see that our Government and our society are doing something about it."

He hitched himself into an easier position in his chair and went on, "But we don't seem to be doing

The touch-football scene: at top, Bobby fakes a handoff to David, and (left) slips the ball to fleet-footed Ethel.

it, at least not as rapidly as they would like to see it done and so they feel alienated. I think also that the demonstrations are indications that there is something more to existence than just material wealth. That in itself cannot make people happy. These young people who are demonstrating or taking LSD trips, or are on pot or whatever it might be, are mostly from the middle-class or upper-class families, who have it made. These young people are not struggling the way the young people were in the 1920's and 1930's, just to survive. Those earlier generations never heard of LSD. They all had to struggle just to make it, to get through school, to get through college, to find jobs, to get married and support a family. With nine or ten million people unemployed, it was very difficult."

At this point there was another sudden invasion of the dining room. "Let me tell you something, Daddy; let me tell you something, Daddy. . . ." Christopher was saying that he and Matthew wanted to go with Daddy to his office, meaning the senatorial office in Washington.

"Listen, Christopher, if you want to go to the office you will have to be quiet now." The senator was being stern, though without a trace of anger. "I am going to be in conference for a little while longer and if you want to go to the office you'll have to go upstairs and get dressed. All right?" "D-a-a-a-dy . . ." "All right?" Christopher promptly vanished up the stairs.

"For the generation of the 1940's," the senator continued, "it was a question of surviving the war, and they went through that with great difficulty. Then in the 1950's there seemed to be a sort of lost generation, and now in the 1960's and 1970's—a generation born right after the war or at the end of it—they don't know the Second World War. They don't know much about Korea. They are suddenly thrown into life, and they find their leaders using a lot of words, not very successfully. Now some have turned to violence, and that's not very satisfactory either. And we still have these tremendous injustices within the United States and abroad, and that doesn't make a great deal of sense. And we are in a struggle 12,000 miles away, and using bombs under circumstances that disturb these young people. So for all these reasons, and with no outlet for idealism in their lives, and nothing in the way of hope for the future being held up for them, it is very frustrating."

'When young people see poverty and discrimination, they would like to see the Government do something about it.'

"They look to you for leadership," I said. "Do you see the solutions? Or are things just going to get worse?"

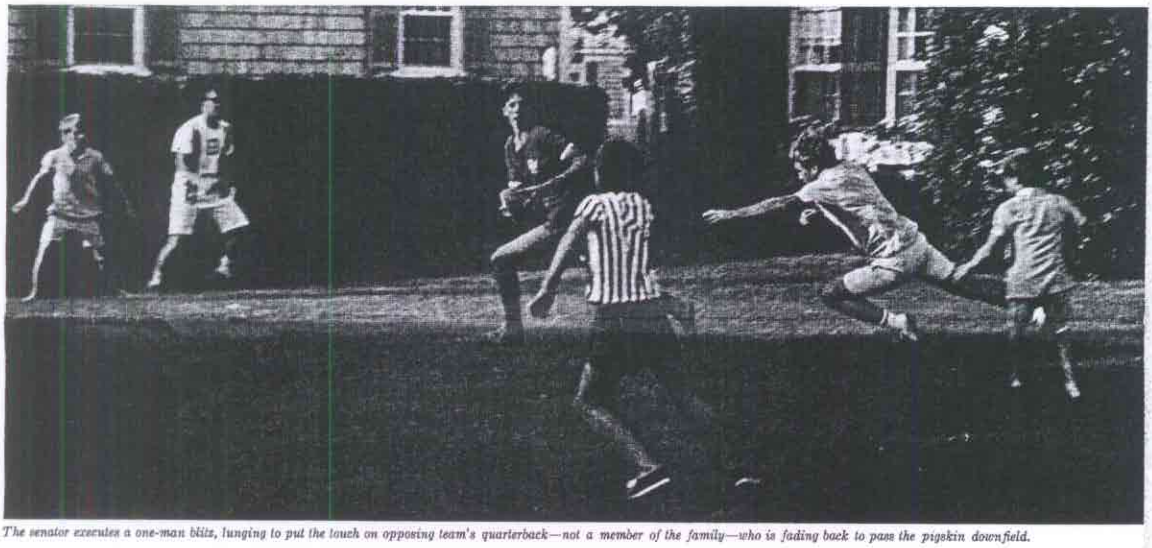
The senator answered almost without pause. "There has to be an idealism instilled in the country, and a hopeful objective for the future. And it must be realistic. I think this was done to some extent in the early 1960's by the Peace Corps, and by the efforts made in the civil-rights movement. Those who wanted then to accomplish something and those who were thinking about changes could, in fact, do something."

What would he advise his own children? "I think that life for them must be an adventure," the senator said. "Young people must be shown a way to escape from the mold they live in, in a responsible way, and to get out of themselves, and get interested in other people. That is the most important thing. You can always find other people with bigger problems than you have. You know the story of the man who complained that he had no shoes until he met the man who had no feet."

I asked Kennedy if he gets a reading on the younger generation from his own children. "Not much, really," he grinned. "My oldest child is only sixteen." But then, more seriously, he added, "I enjoy them a lot and I try to stimulate their interests in many different areas, whether in the fields of poetry, interest in other countries, sports, politics, or any area in which they may have some special interest. A couple of my children are very interested in animals. In fact, they are writing a book on animals, on cruelty to animals. They are having correspondence with people all over the world on that subject. Some of the other children are interested in other areas. I suppose Ethel and I want them to have as wide a range of interests as possible."

What, then, did he want for the United States in 1985, say, when his youngest child will be a teen-ager? The senator thought this one over, but not for very long. "Well, I think there has to be trust in individuals. At the same time we have to feel that society needs something more than personal aggrandizement. If material wealth is emphasized, then I think we are going to have estrangements and difficulties in this country.

"One of the tragic things about Vietnam is the



The senator executes a one-man blitz, lunging to put the touch on opposing team's quarterback—not a member of the family—who is fading back to pass the pigskin downfield.

Kerry, holding her dog, snuggles up beside the often-absent senator during a rare moment of peace and relaxation.

In a very short time the senator came running down the stairs, a dramatically transformed man. He wore a conservatively elegant businessman's suit, and his hair was carefully combed. He was alert and bright-eyed as we walked out the front door. Christopher and Matthew Maxwell Taylor Kennedy followed us, with their mother in hot pursuit. A member of Kennedy's staff was waiting to drive him to the office. The senator got into the front seat of the car, always his preferred position. The children were hurrying over. "Are you coming?" Kennedy called to them. "Yes," they shouted back. "Do they want to come?" the senator called to Mrs. Kennedy. She walked briskly over toward the car. "I didn't know that you'd take them," she said. Christopher announced that he definitely did want to go to his father's office. Mrs. Kennedy and the children were nearing the waiting car, and Bobby said, "Ethel, Mr. Bird wants to know what are the differences between the Kennedy brothers?"

The senator was grinning, and Mrs. Kennedy laughed. "Oh, I'd say that Bobby is much jollier, more outgoing ——" Senator Kennedy broke in, "She's joking, aren't you, Ethel?" and she nodded. "It's awfully hard to compare," she said.

estrangement and alienation between two of our strongest, brightest and most articulate groups—the young ones who were in the Peace Corps, or were Rhodes scholars, or were editors of college magazines, and so on. Some of them represent, I think, a minority who are opposed to the war in Vietnam. And then on the other side are those who are making the sacrifice—going over there to Vietnam to fight, and some to die. These again are the best of our young people, who feel strongly about the efforts we are making to win the war. Now these two groups are becoming more and more alienated from each other, and I think that this is most unfortunate."

Did he think that the universities have anything constructive to say about this? "No," Kennedy said emphatically. "They have become such machines. But we are trying to do something in New York through the Democratic Party—a community action program. You know, I think the political parties can do something more than just try to get people elected. We are trying to get some effectiveness by building an organization that will go in and help the mentally ill, the retarded, and give tutoring that will bring together the college students."

I asked him how he thought the country as a whole might be unified in purpose. "I don't think there will be any magic formula or any one program," he answered. "I think it will begin when the people of this country get a feeling of what the country and society stand for. We'll still have problems, but *that* feeling is lacking at the moment. It is replaced by this internal strife over what we are doing, right or wrong, in Southeast Asia."

The morning was wearing on. From an earlier visit to Suite No. 3327 in the new Senate Office Building, I knew that Robert Kennedy's staff would already be at work dealing with the first of the 1,000 letters which he receives on an average day, and of the 200 telephone calls that would be coming in, many from distant parts of the globe.

Because his seniority in the Senate is low, Kennedy's office is a small one. And because he has one of the largest personal staffs, it is unbelievably crowded, with file cabinets, desks jammed together, potted azaleas and geraniums—and people. Abstracted young men and svelte, cool, mini-skirted girls, some of them speaking alternately in two languages, are constantly passing in and out, and calling across the room to one another. "How's your project going, Janice?" . . . "Teeny, pick up on four." The air fairly vibrates with a feeling of people and ideas in motion.

Without exception, these young men and women feel that Robert Kennedy is interested in more questions of national and international concern than other senators—and he all but overwhelms them with a constant flood of queries and memoranda. "When most people get to the Senate," one staff member explains, "they stop learning and instead begin applying what they have already learned." The clear implication is that this is not true of Sen. Robert Kennedy.

I disliked prolonging the interview further, but I wanted the senator's views on the reason for his appeal to the younger generation. "They think you understand them," I said, "that you are on their side. You must have a sense that they are with you because you have seen them turn out for you by the millions." He was nodding as I said this. "Why do you think these young people all over the country follow you like a pied piper?" "I don't know that," he said, his voice utterly flat.

I mentioned the New Left and he jumped at that. "Well, of course," he said, "those who are completely on the New Left want to destroy our basic institutions because they think they are corrupt, and they share with the extreme right a hostility toward those in the middle who want to preserve and reform those institutions." He hesitated a moment and then went on, "I don't mind their criticism of the establishment or whatever it might be. I think that's all worthwhile, but I just don't happen to agree with it."

Then, without a pause, he added in a fast, hard-to-catch monotone, spoken as if it were a part of the same sentence: "I have to go upstairs to get dressed, would you mind waiting a few minutes in the library and ride to my office with me?"

"Uncle Ted" interrupts buffet lunch on brother's lawn to pick up Bobby and Ethel Kennedy for a sailboat race.

"No, Mummy's not coming," the senator was explaining to Christopher. The children were plainly in a quandary. They wanted to go to Daddy's office and at the same time they wanted to go with Mummy when she drove the older children home from school. The driver had started the motor, and Mrs. Kennedy was pulling the two small boys from the car. "Oh, I thought they were coming to the office," the senator said. "No," Mrs. Kennedy said, "I'm going to take them to school." The senator then put it to them directly and sharply, "Are you going to school, children?" Both children answered, "Yes." "I thought you were going to the office, you rascals," he said. "Well, you come over here and kiss me good-bye. My God, I've been sitting here for ten minutes waiting for you; do you think you're going to get away with that all your life?"

"Ye-e-e-e-s," the children said, running over and throwing their arms around their father. The senator told the driver to get started and, as the car moved off, the Kennedy sheepdog, Panda, set up a noise indicating that he didn't want to be left behind. The senator said Panda would be all right. The dog raced after us for a few moments, then dropped out of sight. □

Kathleen joins her father for a quiet talk on the beach.

The dedicated young men and svelte mini-skirted girls of Kennedy's staff are deluged with memos and queries from him.