

Complex Non-Candidate

THE EDUCATION OF EDWARD KENNEDY, by Burton Hersh (Morrow, \$10.95)

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This is a pre-campaign biography. But it's no hurried hardcover piece, timed for release during the spring primaries.

Rather, Burton Hersh has painstakingly produced an in-depth portrait of the most talked about non-candidate on the presidential horizon.

The last of the three Kennedy brothers is a complex personality.

Born in 1932, he was rocked to political lullabies as were all of Rose Kennedy's babies.

Ted Kennedy is ever aware of his heritage.

The author examines the foundation of the family's politics, laid by Irish immigrant Fitzgeralds and Kennedys in Boston of the 1840s.

Edward Kennedy's career is traced from chubby childhood through Harvard (from which he was expelled for a year for persuading a friend to take his freshman Spanish examination), the Army, and University of Virginia law school where his roommate was John V. Tunney, now California's junior U.S. Senator, as well as through lacerating political campaigns and Chappaquiddick.

Kennedy "seems to have gone through a kind of delayed identity crisis," a life development brutally punctuated by bullets and the Senator's own accident-proneness, historian James MacGregor Burns writes in a foreword to the 510-page book.

Kennedy has confided that he felt like a freak when he returned to his front row seat in the well of the Senate in the autumn after he drove off that tiny bridge. Mary Jo Kopechne, the other occupant of his battered Oldsmobile, died as a result of the mishap.

"Can you imagine how it feels, walking down these corridors and the tourists staring at me? And I know what they are thinking . . . Can you imagine that, if I had in fact done what they think . . . that I would be here?"

To individuals who matter, Kennedy would swear — raising his right hand without realizing it, like a witness in the box — that there had been no fornication, that he had not been drunk.

Hersh recounts that Kennedy laughed as much as he could about the little old lady who waddled up to him on a Boston street. Pulling his head down to her own, she whispered, "You can trust me, Teddy. I voted for your brother. Now what really happened that night on Chappaquiddick Island?"

As winter deepened, Kennedy worked harder.

To this day, though, critics complain that, like the little old lady, they still haven't been told the full story.

In 1970, a year after Chappaquiddick, Ted Kennedy ran for re-election with a new dedication.

The author colorfully describes aides "following where they can and dropping off when they have to throughout those terrible battering early - morning to early - morning days he puts everybody through, week after week, as if in the wake of some migratory mid-Atlantic whale whose tremendous flukes are wagging it north from equatorial latitudes. Home waters within which he must now sieve up, ton after ton daily, plankton enough to blubber him afresh for treacherous dear Washington."

Kennedy won another six - year term. But the senior Senator from Massachusetts was deposed as whip by his Democratic colleagues, a defeat that led to a self-reassessment.

"If you don't know how to lose," Kennedy observed, "you don't deserve to win."