

Memories of the

By George Lardner Jr.
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Washington

The little brunette sat on the couch of her smartly decorated Arlington, Va., apartment and fought back the tears.

"We understand it was an accident," she said fiercely, almost despairingly. "And what can you do about an accident? . . . nobody's trying to hide anything."

For Esther Newberg, 27, and four other young women who spent last Friday night in a rented cottage on Chappaquiddick Island, there was, she suggested, very little to hide.

None of them, she said, knew until the next morning that a 1966 Oldsmobile driven by Senator Edward M. Kennedy had plunged into a nearby tidal pond, killing Mary Jo Kopechne, who had left the party early.

FERRY

"We thought that they'd couldn't the last ferry back." Miss Newberg said softly. "That Mary Jo was back to the motel and that he (the Senator) was at the Shiretown Inn."

So the party went on, perhaps until 1 a.m., she guessed, while Senator Kennedy trudged back, and sat stunned in the back of another car that was parked outside the cottage.

"I didn't know," Miss New-

berg said. "Neither did any of the girls."

All like Mary Jo, veterans of Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign, they were

finally told the next morning by Joseph Gargan, a Kennedy cousin, as he helped ferry them back to Edgartown on adjoining Martha's Vineyard.

MESSAGES

Miss Newberg puffed on a cigarette and looked wearily at the pile of unanswered messages she had just picked up downstairs.

The phone rang.

It was Mary Ellen Lyons, another of the Kennedy campaign's "boiler room" girls who had gathered for the nostalgic weekend reunion.

"Oh, Ellen," she said, still crying. "They just don't quit."

" . . . But we have to tell what happened . . . it was my decision . . . but I didn't know it would be like this. I guess I'm just not tough enough."

After a few minutes, the call was done and Miss Newberg, her composure back, began again, attempting to answer at least some of the questions prompted by a statement Kennedy made last Saturday.

COMMENT

No, she said, no one had told the girls to say nothing. The only reason they hadn't spoken up the day before at Miss Kopechne's funeral, she said, was that "this was Mary Jo's day and it wouldn't have been fair."

Miss Newberg was reticent on one point, however: had



UPI Telephoto

ESTHER NEWBERG
There was very little to hide



UPI Telephoto

MARY JO KOPECHNE
The victim was 'just the one to leave early'

Kennedy Party



AP Wirephoto

MARY ELLEN LYONS
There had been several parties and reunions

there been drinking at the party?

"That relates to a hearing in Edgartown (for Senator Kennedy) on Monday," she said. "I don't think it would be fair to say anything until the trial or the hearing or whatever."

However, in a copyrighted story yesterday in Newsday, the Long Island, N.Y., newspaper, Miss Newberg did say drinking was at a minimum.

On Friday, Miss Newberg said, they went out in a chartered fishing boat to watch the annual Edgartown Regatta in which Senator Kennedy's yacht, the Victoria, placed ninth.

The party, "It was more of a cookout than a party," she said, began around 8 p.m. in the cottage that Gargan had rented for the reunion.

"There wasn't anything unusual in our getting together," she said. Senator Kennedy, his aides, and the girls from the "boiler Room" — a

campaign information center — had reciprocated with parties and reunions ever since last July when he took the girls sailing.

Besides Miss Newberg and Miss Kopechne, the girls at the party were Maryellen and Nancy Lyons, Rosemary Keough and Susan Tannenbaum. The men were Kennedy, Joseph Gargan, a cousin of Kennedy's; Ray Larosa and Charles Treeter, sailing companions of Kennedy; Paul Markham, former U.S. Attorney in Massachusetts; and John Crimmins, the senator's driver.

The party was so informal, Miss Newberg said, that no one kept track of who was there. No one, therefore, missed the senator or Miss Kopechne when they left, she said.

LUCKY

In addition, Miss Newberg recalled that sometime after Kennedy left, two of the men

who remained went outside for a time.

"At some point, I guess we wondered where Mary Jo was and decided she had been lucky enough to make the ferry," she said. "We just assumed that senator was exhausted and had gone back to his hotel in Edgartown."

About 12:30 or 1 a.m., people in the cottage began going to sleep. All ten spent the night in the cottage, she said.

The next morning when Miss Newberg awoke, Miss Tannenbaum, Miss Keough, Gargan and Treter had already left the cottage — for breakfast on the Vineyard, she said.

TRAGEDY

When Gargan returned with the other three, he told them, for the first time, that there had been a "tragedy," Miss Newberg said.

It wasn't until they got to Edgartown and the girls had started packing in their motel that Gargan phoned to tell them that Miss Kopechne's body had been found.

The two men who left the party were Gargan and Markham, Miss Newberg said. She doesn't remember how long they were gone. The senator has said that he climbed into a car parked in front of the cottage and asked "someone" to take him to Edgartown after he walked back from the accident scene.

Miss Newberg also disclaims any knowledge of what the two men might have done outside.

"I didn't think that Senator Kennedy might be out there in the bushes," she said.

With the exception of Miss Newberg, the four other girls were maintaining a strict silence on what happened.