

## One Who Knew Her

# This Was Mary Jo

By Martin F. Nolan

WASHINGTON — (WNS) — The reputation of Mary Jo Kopecznes ultimately exceeds in importance all other aspects of the Edgartown tragedy.

It is important because her good name will not be affirmed on a joyous election night with marching drum and bugle corps and cheers from the multitude.

It is important because suspicion about her circulated widely in a silence imposed by lawyers, speechwriters and strategists with minimal interest in her reputation.

It is important because she can not testify on her own behalf.

I knew Mary Jo for four years, since she first went to work for the late Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. Her convent-school demeanor contrasted vividly with that of her co-workers, many of whom sported short skirts, long tresses and voices like Talullah Bankhead's.

The glossy, magazine-spread version of the Kennedy saga dunked court jesters in swimming pools and jetted glamorous people to glamorous places.

Somebody, meanwhile, had to do the work. Mary Jo was one of the most important somebodies and her work and that of her fellow toilers in the delegate-counting "boiler room" was rewarded by the soiree at Chappaquiddick.

Her enthusiasm was intense and fervent. Sen. Kennedy mentioned that she was "broken up" over the death of her boss and that was true.

Almost a year ago, janitors were cleaning Robert Kennedy's office for the last time and two of her friends, Esther Newberg and Nance Lyons were, with Mary Jo, especially distraught. They wanted to go to a Red Sox game against the Senators that night and needed hard-to-get tickets in a hurry. Through the good offices of Boston Globe sportswriter Bob Sales, the tickets were produced and Mary Jo jumped up, kissed me on the cheek, then blushed an immediate vermilion.

That night, at what is now Robert F. Kennedy Stadium, Reggie Smith made an epic catch to save the game, Carl Yastrzemski contributed several hits and Mary Jo had two new heroes. "Yastrzemski is really Slovak, you know, just like the Kopecznes," she said afterward.

Mary Jo was a self-admitted "novena Catholic" with dim views on Pope John's "aggiornamento." But she loved to talk, argue and listen to discussions about her religion and be-

gan to read modern theology books.

Baseball, kids, Christmas — these were her passions. Once, after a discussion with Robert Kennedy about religion (in which he shared her views) he left with a big smile and assured the third participant in the discussion a long stay in purgatory.

She grinned proudly and said, "I just love that man!"

That kind of love has poured into Washington and Hyannis Port — unquestioning, fervent, platonic and irredeemable.

The Kopecznes have no legend to sustain them, with all its curses, no staff to sort out the venomous mail and phone calls, no lawyers with leather briefcases to argue her case.

But then, she has no case because she is innocent.



**FATAL** figure in Ted Kennedy's automobile accident, Mary Jo Kopecznes, loved kids and baseball.

## Kopecznes May Go To Inquest

NEW YORK — (UPI) — Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kopecznes, puzzled over the silence of five girlfriends of their daughter Mary Jo who died in a car driven by Sen. Edward Kennedy, are considering attending a Sept. 3 inquest into the case "in hope of getting the answers they want," Time magazine has reported.

The article said the Berkeley Heights, N.J., couple may go to Edgartown, Mass., near the scene of the Chappaquiddick Island accident last month, to attend the inquest.

Time yesterday quoted Mrs. Kopecznes' concern over the silence of five other girls, all friends of Mary Jo, who attended the Chappaquiddick party which preceded the accident.

"The girls know they could lessen the heartache we have by giving some answers," she said.

However, the magazine said during the interview with the Kopecznes, Joseph Kopecznes added, "Those girls aren't going to talk."

According to Time, the family only wants to know what occurred at the party and how and why Mary Jo left it.