

Victim Drawn to Politics

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

"It was a good career, working with the politicians. It was what she wanted to do," Mrs. Gwen Kopechne said yesterday of her daughter, Mary Jo, who was killed in the automobile accident involving Senator Edward M. Kennedy. "She would have been 29 years old next Saturday."

In a telephone interview from her home in Berkeley Heights, N. J., in Union County, Mrs. Kopechne said her daughter had been working in politics since a year after her graduation from Caldwell College for Women in Caldwell, N. J., in 1962.

Her latest job was with Matt Reese Associates in Washington, an organization that sets up campaign headquarters for politicians.

Mrs. Kopechne said her blond, 5-foot, 4-inch daughter—her only child—had taught school at the Mission of St. Jude in Montgomery, Ala., in the year after her college graduation.

In 1963, she joined the staff of Senator George A. Smathers of Florida. Miss Kopechne transferred to the staff of the Senator Robert F. Kennedy upon his election in New York in 1964.

Her position with the late Senator's staff was as a secretary to various speech writers and, later, as a legal secretary to Joseph Dolan, a legal adviser to Mr. Kennedy.

Miss Kopechne joined Matt Reese Associates following Mr. Kennedy's assassination in June, 1968.

Born in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., Miss Kopechne moved with her family to New Jersey as a infant. Her father, Joseph Kopechne, is a salesman for the Washington National Insurance Company.

Mrs. Kopechne said her daughter had been living in Washington since 1963, and, since the assassination of Robert Kennedy, had continued to associate with many members of the late Senator's organization.

Several members of the late Senator's staff, including Miss Kopechne, had been occasional guests of Senator Edward Kennedy, Mrs. Kopechne said.

This weekend, she said, her daughter had been invited to Hyannis Port along with several other former aides to Robert Kennedy for some sailing and relaxation.

Telephone Call

Mrs. Kopechne said her daughter had sailed with Senator Kennedy from Hyannis Port to Martha's Vineyard.

The mother said Senator Kennedy had telephoned her and her husband personally to tell them of the accident. The Senator said Miss Kopechne was returning to take the ferry back to the mainland when the accident occurred, Mrs. Kopechne said.

"He didn't give me any details," she said. "He just told me what happened and I broke down."

"After Robert Kennedy was killed, Ted Kennedy seemed to try to hang on to his brother's staff," Mrs. Kopechne said. She noted, however, that her daughter had held no official position with Edward Kennedy's office.

"He just entertained them up there at Hyannis Port," she said.

Mrs. Kopechne said that Senator Kennedy's staff was making arrangements for the funeral and burial, which is to take place in Wilkes-Barre.

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