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Kennedy Party Guest Learned of Death in Morning

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—Five of the women at the ill-fated Kennedy political reunion at Martha's Vineyard last Friday did not learn that the sixth — 28-year-old Mary Jo Kopechne — had drowned until the middle of next morning, one of them said Wednesday.

Esther R. Newberg said that Senator Edward M. Kennedy had not returned to the cottage where the party was taking place, to her knowledge, after he had left sometime before midnight.

Miss Newberg recalled that at one point, after Senator Kennedy left the cottage for the drive that led to the fatal accident, two of the other men had gone outside for a time.

In describing the Martha's Vineyard reunion of the six women who had worked in the Robert F. Kennedy Presidential campaign, Miss Newberg declined to discuss events that she thought might be prejudicial to the hearing on charges of leaving the scene of the accident that Senator Edward Kennedy faces next Monday.

No Comparison of Stories

In response to a question, the 26-year-old former political aide said that she and the four other girls who had attended the party had not tried to compare notes later and produce any consistent story of the episode.

Miss Newberg confirmed that 10 others beside herself and Miss Kopechne had attended

the Martha's Vineyard party. The other women, all of whom had worked in a delegate-counting operation in Robert Kennedy's Washington headquarters, were:

Nance Lyons, an aide to Senator Edward Kennedy; her sister, Maryellen Lyons, who works for State Senator Beryl Cohen of Massachusetts; Rosemary Keough, known as "Crick-et," who works for the children's Foundation in Washington; and Susan Tannenbaum of the staff of Representative Alard K. Lowenstein, Democrat of New York.

The men, in addition to Senator Kennedy, were: Joseph Gargan, a cousin and political associate of the Senator's; Ray Larosa and Charles Tretter, both described as sailing companions of Mr. Kennedy; Paul Markham, a former United States Attorney in Massachusetts; and John Crimmins, the Senator's driver and general assistant.

Girls Arrived Together

This was the account Miss Newberg gave of the events of last Friday and Saturday:

Mr. Larosa picked up the six women at their motel, the Dunes, in Edgartown, on the South Shore of Martha's Vineyard about 8 or 8:30 P.M. on Friday and drove them to a rented cottage on Chappaquiddick Island, at the eastern end of the Vineyard.

Senator Kennedy and the four other men were already there, she said. They got a fire going and within an hour or so

grilled steaks for the group. They finished eating about 10:30 P.M. The group was relaxed and somewhat tired; all of them had either participated in the afternoon's boat races or watched.

Miss Newberg described it as an informal group, with no one keeping particular track of who was there or who wasn't there at any given time. Thus, she said, no one specifically missed either the Senator or Miss Kopechne or noticed what time they had left.

"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 the Senator was exhausted and had gone back to his hotel in Edgartown. No one had expected him to stay. No one was worried or concerned.

"I suppose if there had been a telephone in the cottage we would have called to check, but there wasn't."

About 12:30 or 1 A.M., Miss Newberg continued, the partygoers began going to sleep in the cottage. There were but two bedrooms, and some used the floor. Some stayed up and talked for a while. The entire remaining group of five men and five women spent the night in the cottage.

Told of 'Tragedy'

The next morning when Miss Newberg awoke, Miss Tannenbaum, Miss Keough, Mr. Gargan and Mr. Tretter had already left the cottage, for breakfast on the Vineyard. About 9 A.M., Miss Newberg and the Lyons

sisters started walking toward the ferry from the cottage.

As they did, Mr. Gargan, returning in a car with the three other partygoers, met the three women, picked them up and drove them back to the cottage. He told them then, for the first time, that there had been an accident; Miss Newberg thinks he used the word "tragedy."

Mr. Gargan did not tell them that Miss Kopechne was dead, but simply, as Miss Newberg recalls, that "we can't find Mary Jo."

Mr. Gargan then drove the five women back to the hotel in Edgartown, where they began packing. About 10 A.M., Mr. Gargan telephoned the news that Miss Kopechne's body had been found and that she had drowned, although Senator Kennedy had tried to save her.

The two men who left the party, apparently sometime between 10:30 P.M. and 1 A.M., were Mr. Gargan and Mr. Markham, according to Miss Newberg. She does not remember when they left or how long they were gone and disclaims any knowledge of what they may have done outside.

With the exception of Miss Newberg, all of the women who were at the cookout with Senator Kennedy last Friday night on Chappaquiddick Island were maintaining a strict silence on what happened or were absent from their Washington apartments and offices after returning from the funeral of Miss Kopechne yesterday in Plymouth, Pa.