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# Interview With Mary Jo Kopechne's Mother Reveals: Ted Was First to Tell Her of Daughter's Death

Reporter Paul R. Stevens was the first newsman to talk at length and alone to Mrs. Gwen L. Kopechne after she had learned that the body of her daughter, Mary Jo, would not be dug up for an autopsy. Stevens was not satisfied with the routine questions presented at the press conference held following Judge Bernard Brominski's announcement on December 10. So that evening, Stevens placed a telephone call to the Kopechne home in Berkeley Heights, N.J.

For the first time in months Mrs. Kopechne answered her telephone. In her moment of joy and relief over the judge's decision not to disturb her daughter's grave, Mrs. Kopechne poured out her pent-up and emotion-filled story. Here is that story.

By PAUL R. STEVENS

Senator Ted Kennedy was the first person to notify Mary Jo Kopechne's parents that their daughter was dead.

Kennedy's call sent Mrs. Gwen L. Kopechne, Mary Jo's mother, screaming from her telephone.

"I fell apart. I screamed — and went into shock," Mrs. Kopechne said in an exclusive interview.

She remembered that Kennedy telephoned at about 9 a.m. on July 19, or at about the time Mary Jo's body was being recovered from Kennedy's car which had gone off a bridge and into a tidal pond on Chappaquiddick Island in Massachusetts the night before.

Mrs. Kopechne said that in her state of shock she hung up the telephone when Kennedy told her of her daughter's death. She said Kennedy called back and talked to her husband, Joseph Kopechne.

Mrs. Kopechne said, "Senator Kennedy appeared to be full of shock, himself. He has told me since that he was in shock that terrible morning, and didn't know what had happened.

"I believe he was in a state of shock for several hours following the accident. I know what shock is and what it can do to you.

"I don't remember anything about my daughter's casket in church. I don't understand now how I went to church or to the cemetery.

"I felt like a mechanical person, all wound up. I believe in shock. I can't discredit it. I witnessed shock when my younger brother, who was the high school wrestling champion of Pennsylvania, suffered from it after taking a fall.

"At my daughter's funeral, I talked mechanically to people. I didn't know who they were."

Mrs. Kopechne said she noticed a vast difference in Senator Kennedy between the time when he first called her on July 19 and when he talked to her on December 10, the day of Judge Bernard C. Brominski's decision.

"In the many times he has called me, I have never heard him so relaxed," Mrs. Kopechne said. "It had been a hard exchange of phone calls up to this one. On the day of the decision he seemed very relaxed. Something had finally happened that was good.

"I told the Senator, 'I think I've lost 45 wrinkles in my face today.' The Senator chuckled at this . . . it



**DROWNED:** Mary Jo Kopechne lost her life while riding as a passenger in a car driven by Senator Edward Kennedy.

was the first time I've heard him sound at all happy.

"He said to me, 'I'm very happy for you. I know what this means to you.'

"He has called my husband or me about once a month since Mary Jo's death. He's been very considerate. I think the man has been suffering very badly."

Mrs. Kopechne said Senator Kennedy reached her at a motel in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., where they stayed awaiting Judge Brominski's decision on whether or not to allow Mary Jo's body to be exhumed from St. Vincent's Cemetery, in Larksville, Pa.

"He found out where we were through Dun Gifford," she said. (Gifford is an aide of Sen. Kennedy. He flew with Mary Jo's body to Pennsylvania after her death on Chappaquiddick Island. He has visited the Kopechnes' home many times).

"Mr. Gifford has been a great comfort to us," Mrs. Kopechne said. "He called the only person in Berkeley Heights who knew where we were,



**SMILES OF RELIEF:** Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Kopechne show their happy reaction to news that the body of their daughter will not be exhumed.

a neighbor who always knows where to find us.

"She wouldn't have told anyone else where we were, but she told Dun who told Senator Kennedy."

Mrs. Kopechne said the days leading up to the court decision were very nerve-racking for her.

"I took 11 tranquilizers on the day of the decision," she said. "I don't think I could have stood it if he had allowed her body to be dug up. It meant a lot to me. It's hard enough to go to that grave now. It would have cut me to my very soul if she had been disturbed."

Mr. and Mrs. Kopechne hadn't planned to go to Wilkes-Barre for the decision, but they changed their mind at the urging of their lawyer, Joseph Flanagan.

They checked into the Holiday Town House, across from the court house, on December 9. Mrs. Kopechne said, "I was so nervous and afraid that the decision would go against us that I was in a terrible state. My husband said, 'All right, we'll go back home.'

"Then about 10:30 p.m. our lawyer called us. He told us that he already knew what the judge's decision would be. To calm me and to allow me to get a good night's sleep, he said the decision was going to be a favorable one."

But the next morning, Mr. and Mrs. Kopechne were upset again when they met a reporter from the Associated



**AT CEMETERY:** Ted Kennedy and wife Joan attend the funeral of Miss Kopechne.

Press in their motel who told them he had heard the decision would be to exhume Mary Jo.

"The reporter invited us to eat breakfast with him, but my husband said we couldn't. Not after what he had told us. It was a great relief when we officially got the word at about 10 a.m. that day."

## Finds Lost Contact Lens 40 Months Later — Under His Eyelid

Lost contact lenses are tough to find, but a man in Toronto hunted 40 months before one was discovered in the last place he thought of looking — under his own eyelid.

A punch in the eye had pushed it out of place. He thought it fell to the ground.

But eventually he went to ophthalmologist Ellis Shenken to find out why tears kept forming and why his new lens kept popping out.

The doctor found that the old lens was imbedded in the eyelid and was causing the trouble.

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