

How Ted Kennedy Made Up His Mind

Difficult Decision On 1976

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Senator Edward M. Kennedy was driving home aggressively through rush-hour traffic on the evening of the day he had said he would not take what was his for the asking — the Democratic presidential nomination.

The decision, he said, had not been reached in the usual Kennedy style, at a meeting attended by those men who live only to be summoned to Hyannisport to council a Kennedy in time of advice or anguish.

Kennedy made up his mind alone, during the August recess. He expected to announce his decision around Christmas.

One night David Burke, Kennedy's gifted and prized former aide now working on Wall Street, came to Hyannisport for a cookout. He and Kennedy sat for two hours and went through it. Burke, thinking he was meant to, gave all the reasons against the decision.

"I didn't ask him," Kennedy said. "I told him."

It hadn't been easy. The White House is in the Kennedy blood. Teddy is a born politician, and for all the clouds over his head, he was the giant among Democratic candidates.

"That's where the power is to do what you want to do," Kennedy said. "And the

way we were brought up, you know, my father told us we should make things happen. That was true of Jack, but less true of Bobby and least of me. A lot of things happened to me."

There was the grave illness of his 12-year-old son, Teddy Jr. There was the

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emotional state of his wife, Joan.

Joan, who has been called "the reluctant Kennedy," was haunted by two obsessions: one, shared by all the family, was that some fanatic was lurking to gun down a third Kennedy. The other was that Teddy might succeed and she would be in for a job she felt she could not handle. She has been twice institutionalized in recent months.

Assassination didn't figure in Teddy's calculation.

"I'm fireproof," he said. "Things harden you. Jack and my accident and Bobby and what happened in 1969. But I can understand the impact on other people. I see the fallout with Bobby's children. They've had troubles they just wouldn't have had if he was around."

Ted Kennedy is confident he could have overcome Chappaquiddick, which he refers to as "1969" or "the tragedy." He would have had to work hard, but with his family troubles, "it would be like going into it with half a cylinder missing."

Nobody in the family had opposed him. His 84-year-old mother, Rose, certainly did not. When he saw her Sunday night, she put an old-fashioned plaster on his aching back and sent him forth with her blessing to say no.

He was up early Monday morning, making his calls like a proper Kennedy. He called the other hopefuls and some old friends.

Mayor Daley of Chicago, who had always been for the Kennedys, expressed the most regret when Ted told him, "We won't be going — this time."

The Kennedy staff was plainly reconciled, to the point of relief. Three of them watched the news conference only slightly misty-eyed. "Look at Joan," cried one of the girls, "Doesn't she look absolutely great?"

Kennedy strode into the office at 1 o'clock Monday, looking hearty and ruddy. He collided with a telephone man who was retiring the system.

"Look at that," Kennedy roared. "Already they're taking the phones out. You really find out who your friends are at a time like this."

Then he bolted down lunch at his desk and headed for the Senate floor.

Occasionally, a Democrat would come up, with a sad smile, and pat Kennedy on the back.

Senator Henry M. Jackson, who considers himself the prime beneficiary, leaned over Kennedy for minutes of earnest discussion.

On the way home, Kennedy said, "There isn't one of them that doesn't see himself doing it. Well, they're welcome to it."

Would he endorse anyone? "I don't see why I should. They've begun to say; just one word from you, but I've heard that before. You saw what happened in south Boston."

Kennedy drove into the grounds of his beautiful, gray-shingled, tree-lined house in McLean. He greeted his three children and sat down to watch himself on television news shows.

Joan, smiling and quiet, came to join him. And how did she feel?

"Relieved," she breathed.