

Kennedy Women—Still

Amazing
Strength
And Faith

Unbowed

By JOY MILLER
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kennedy women always hold up their heads, and they meet tragedy, as they meet triumph, with a magnificent dignity.

Of success and sorrow they have seen more, perhaps, than most women, and they have had to bear them in the public gaze.

With sons or husbands or brothers who have achieved heights to which average men do not aspire, their tragic ends, when they have come, have occasioned national mourning.

Rose Kennedy, at 77 the vital, youthful-looking matriarch of the Kennedy family, sets the pattern of gallant behavior in time of heartbreak.

'FAITH IN GOD'

After the assassination of her second-born son, President Kennedy, in 1963, she said:

"This is the third child I've lost. I've learned to be brave and to put my faith in the will of God."

Now that Sen. Robert Kennedy has become the second son slain by an assassin's bullet, the count is four of her nine children dead violently. But Rose Kennedy has lost neither her singular composure nor her strong faith.

The senator's 40-year-old widow, Ethel, who was rarely far from his side in their 18 years of marriage — whether they were shooting river rapids, touring the world, playing touch football or campaigning — was with her husband in Los Angeles when he was cut down. Throughout the grueling

hours of uncertain waiting she showed remarkable self-restraint, doctors said.

MAINTAINED TRADITION

In her calm control and concern for others during the difficult days that followed, Ethel Kennedy, who has been called "everybody's favorite Kennedy," maintained the tradition of Kennedy women, even as did her sister-in-law Jacqueline in November, 1963.

Mrs. John F. Kennedy's control and sense of history throughout that fateful weekend after the President was shot moved the London Evening Standard to write:

"Jacqueline Kennedy has given the American people from this day on one thing they have always lacked — majesty."

The former First Lady, who had given birth in 1956 to a stillborn daughter and who only three months before the assassination had

buried their newborn son, Patrick Bouvier Kennedy, then took up the two-fold task of rearing her two fatherless children and perpetuating the memory of her husband.

AIDED BY RFK

Robert Kennedy, her brother-in-law, was a mainstay during the critical period and acted almost like a father to little Caroline and John Jr.

Now his widow, who is expecting her 11th child in January, is faced with bringing up their large family alone at Hickory Hill, their six-acre home at McLean, Va.

Ethel Kennedy's tragedies began with the death of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. George Skakel, in the crash of a private plane in Oklahoma in 1955. Skakel, a self-made millionaire, had seven children.

Then her brother, George Skakel Jr., died in a plane crash in 1966, and last year his widow choked to death on a piece of food caught in her throat.

'ROSE UNCOMPARABLE'

But for a life marked by triumphs and tragedy and unflagging courage, none quite compares with Rose Kennedy's.

In 1914 young Rose, daughter of John Fitzgerald, the fabulous "Honey Fitz," mayor of Boston and a political powerhouse, married Joseph P. Kennedy.

Babies started coming. Rosemary, the fourth child and second girl, was the first heartbreak. She was born retarded and later, in her 20s was institutionalized, which was a kind of death to the loving mother.

World War II began, and Rose Kennedy's firstborn, Joseph Jr., a Navy lieutenant and pilot, was killed when his plane blew up.

"Joseph Jr. was the one we thought would go into politics," his mother once said. "Jack always thought he'd be a writer, or perhaps the head of a boys school in the country..."

Her high-spirited oldest

daughter, Kathleen, married an English marquess, Billy Hartington.

But within a month the marquess was killed in action in World War II. Four years later Kathleen died in a plane crash and was buried beside her husband in Derbyshire, England.

Before her husband suffered the crippling strokes that have made him an invalid and before her second and third sons were assassinated, Rose Kennedy told a reporter:

"A strong belief is the most wonderful thing that can happen to you. The fact that I've had one has given me a certain stability. But don't say I have fortitude. That makes me sound so sanctimonious."

The younger Kennedy sisters, Eunice, Patricia and Jean, are in the Kennedy mold of strong women. During the harrowing past days they have moved quietly and calmly doing what must be done, their emotions in stern check.

EUNICE FAVORED

Eunice, 47, is married to Sargent Shriver, former director of the Peace Corps and now ambassador to France, and mother of five.

Considered the most intellectual of the sisters, and the one most like Jack Kennedy, Eunice was the sister used most by the President for special jobs, such as his committee on retardation, and most often chosen to stand in for Jacqueline Kennedy.

Jean, the youngest Kennedy girl, was the roommate of fun-loving, energetic Ethel Skakel at Manhattanville College, and she introduced Ethel to her future husband in 1945.

Ethel began her political campaigning by stuffing envelopes in the 1946 congressional campaign of John Kennedy and married Robert in 1950.

Jean Kennedy married Stephen Smith, whom she met at Georgetown University

where they were both students, and who has become the astute Kennedy business and political manager. They have two children.

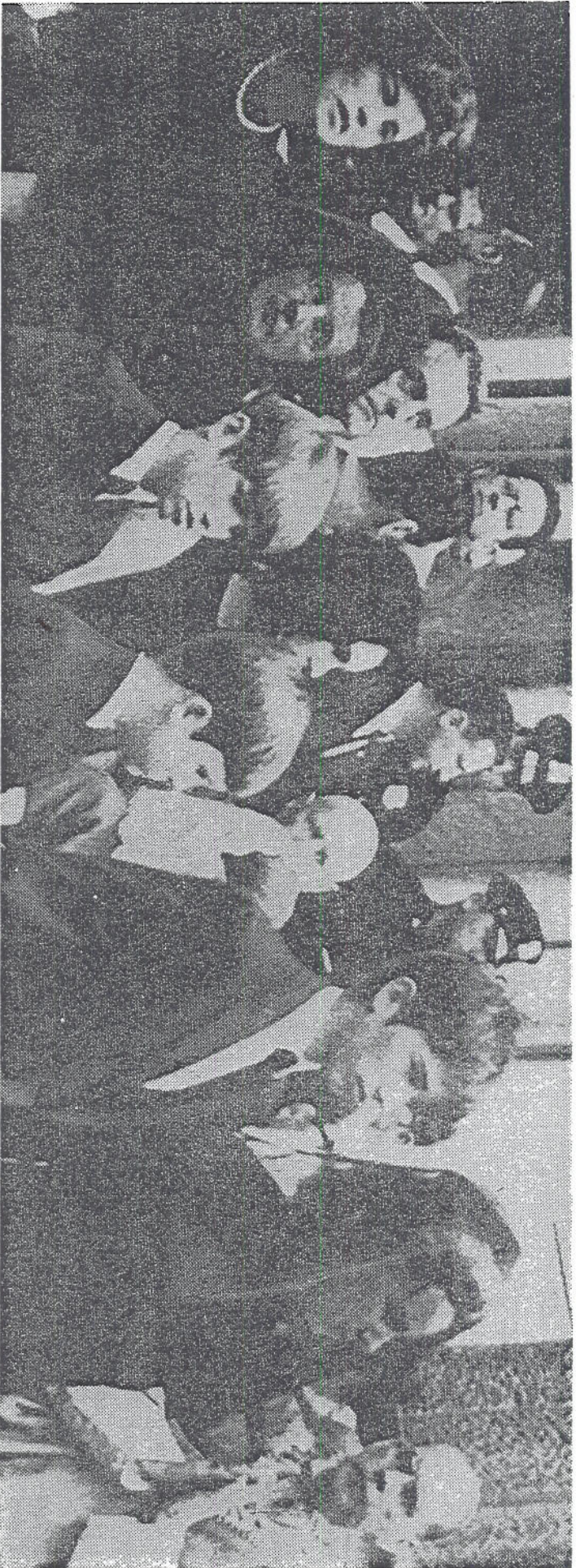
Immediately after the shooting of Senator Kennedy in the hotel kitchen, when the room erupted into hysteria, one quiet voice could be heard over the loudspeaker urging everyone to leave calmly.

It was Stephen Smith. Standing behind him, looking as composed as her husband, although her inner thoughts must have been in turmoil, was Jean Kennedy Smith.

It was only to be expected that the most self-possessed woman in the room would be a Kennedy.



Mrs. John F. Kennedy, her children Caroline and John, kneeling at mass



Mrs. Robert Kennedy and children leave St. Patrick's. Behind, wearing veil, is the senator's mother, Mrs. Rose Kennedy

—AP Wirephoto