



Kennedy (at the U.S. Capitol) has "superhuman persistence," says niece Kathleen Kennedy Townsend.

The Torchbearer

Once overshadowed by his brothers, Ted Kennedy has become the rock of his clan

When young Teddy Kennedy played prep-school football at Milton Academy in Massachusetts in the 1940s, his teammates concocted a play they called the Lumbago Pass, named for a painful lower-back ailment. The strategy was to get the ball to the burly, spirited Kennedy. "The opposing players would fall on top of him, and he'd drag them all down the

field and stagger across the goal line," says friend and biographer (*The Shadow President*) Burton Hersh. "He was willing to take the punishment to make a goal. That's the way he's lived his life."

Edward Moore Kennedy, 67, has spent most of his years in the shadows of his martyred brothers John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy, but now the public is becoming increas-

ingly aware of his role as the patriarch and political powerhouse of the family. With the tragic death last month of his nephew John Jr., it became more apparent than ever that Ted—in his sixth full term as Democratic senator from Massachusetts—is the Kennedy who carries the clan on his shoulders. "We grew up to think of my father and uncle [John] as saints," says TV reporter Douglas

Just a month after nixing their nuptials, Schrager and Hughes (in Manhattan in April 1990) were once again living together.



A publicist says nope to a pre-nup

It was late morning on March 16, 1990, and Deborah Hughes was watching florists and caterers bustle around the Southampton, N.Y., estate she shared with her fiancé, former Studio 54 co-owner Ian Schrager. Hughes knew she should begin dressing for their 1 p.m. wedding, but she was still steaming over what she calls “a telephone-book-sized” prenuptial agreement that the millionaire had sprung on her the week before. “You’re expected to walk down the aisle and say ‘I do,’” she says, “when what you really feel like doing is hitting him over the head!”

Hughes didn’t wallop Schrager that day—or marry him either. Instead, a few minutes before the ceremony, she called the whole thing off. Her decision, says Hughes (then a publicist for designer Carolina Herrera, whose husband had introduced the couple), “had nothing to do with money. It had to do with control. It was like having a divorce before you got married.”

Schrager’s brother Bernard broke the news to the 80 guests, including Calvin Klein and billionaire Ron Perelman. But while Schrager secluded himself in his bedroom, Hughes—her Herrera gown still on its hanger—put on a little black dress and played hostess. “When the door opened and I walked through it,” she recalls, “you would have thought a ghost entered the room. There were gasps.”

Some pals gasped again when the couple resumed dating two weeks later. They never again discussed that day, says Hughes: “It was a very dangerous subject.” They broke up for good in 1992. These days, Hughes, 42, who is single and lives in a one-bedroom apartment in Manhattan, runs her own public relations firm. As for her scrapped nuptials, “It just wasn’t meant to be,” she says philosophically. “I don’t regret it, and I’m sure Ian doesn’t either.”

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“Never look back,” says Hughes (with friends Scott Sevier, left, and David Goldsmith).

Kennedy, 32, Bobby and Ethel Kennedy's youngest son. "But it is really Teddy who has stood up to the great challenge of life and lived it."

Just three days after he delivered a stirring eulogy at the July 23 memorial service for John Jr. and his wife, Carolyn, Kennedy was back on the Senate floor—tired and worn but ready for work. "He is able to handle things that would blow most people away," says former Sen. Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.), a close friend. "He's been hammered, and when you're hammered you gain strength."

Born Feb. 22, 1932, the youngest of Rose and Joe Kennedy's nine children, young Teddy was the chubby clown of the brood, who would lead the family in Irish songs around the piano. "He always seemed to be laughing," says sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver. "He was just constantly cheerful."

But his carefree, privileged youth was shattered by the 1944 death in World War II of oldest brother Joe Jr., who had been a father figure to Teddy. Initially reluctant to go into politics, Ted—who in 1958 married debutante Joan Bennett—in 1962 easily won the U.S. Senate seat left vacant by his brother John when he won the White House in 1960. (Family friend Benjamin Smith held the seat until Ted was 30, old enough to run.) Ted Kennedy was presiding over the Senate on Nov. 22, 1963, when he got word that the President had been shot. (The day his brother was buried, Ted made it to John Jr.'s 3rd-birthday party.)

Seven months later the small plane taking Ted to a state Democratic convention in western Massachusetts crashed, killing the pilot and Kennedy's administrative assistant. His back broken in more than 20 places, Kennedy—told he might never walk again—spent six months hospitalized in a full-body metal frame. Left with recurring pain, he was campaigning in support of Bobby's 1968 presidential bid when he received the shattering news that his brother had been gunned down. "The burden fell like a thud on his shoulders when Bobby was murdered," says longtime Kennedy observer Tom Oliphant, a *Boston Globe* columnist. "It fell so hard that his knees buckled at first."

At age 36, Kennedy—by then the



"It's a question of high standards being set by my brothers and being measured against those constantly," Kennedy (right, in '46 with John and Robert) once said of his burden.



Happier times: The young senator posed in 1962 with wife Joan, Kara and Ted Jr.

father of three—Kara, now 39, Ted Jr., 37, and Patrick, 32—found himself a surrogate parent not only to the President's children John Jr. and Caroline but also to Bobby and Ethel Kennedy's 10 children. (Youngest child Rory was born six months later.) "He was like the Pied Piper," says Barbara Gibson, Rose Kennedy's personal secretary in the late '60s, who remembers Ted organizing boating and camping trips during family vacations. "Wherever he was, there was a bunch of kids following him around." And he took on the less playful aspects of parenthood as well. "When we got into trouble at school," recalls Christopher Kennedy,



Ted (after the '64 plane crash) once said, "I don't dwell on the negative aspects of life."



Ted (with Ted Jr. in '73) "fathered three children but raised 16," says a nephew.



"He was my baby," Rose Kennedy once said of Ted (with her in Hyannisport in 1982). "And I tried to keep him my baby."



"He's not their surrogate father," family friend Larry Spagnola says of Kennedy (with family members at Bobby's grave in 1968). "He's their dad. And he takes that very seriously."



Kennedy called his Chappaquiddick actions "indefensible."

36, Bobby and Ethel's son, "our mothers would call him to give us a tongue lashing. Believe me, he could scare you straight."

Yet Kennedy himself failed to hew to the straight and narrow in his own relentlessly public private life. Late on the night of July 18, 1969, after a no-spouses party for Bobby's campaign staff on Martha's Vineyard, he drove his car off the bridge to Chappaquiddick Island. Mary Jo Kopechne, a 28-year-old campaign aide, died in the accident. Inexplicably, the senator, who swam from the wreck, did not report the incident to police for 10 hours. "I was overcome, I'm frank to say, by a jumble of emotions: grief, fear, doubt, exhaustion, panic, confusion and shock," he said in a televised speech.

He pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge of leaving the scene of an accident. Though he met twice with the victim's family, her mother, Gwen Kopechne, told *Ladies' Home Journal*, "I don't think he seemed up-

set either time . . . and I don't remember him saying he was sorry." Kennedy's two-month sentence was suspended, but the scandal cast a pall over his career.

His 1980 bid for the Presidency, challenging incumbent Jimmy Carter, failed, but Kennedy was earning the respect of his colleagues as a leader in the U.S. Senate. "He's one of the most effective senators of this century,"

Senate minority leader Tom Daschle says of Kennedy, who can claim credit for, among other items, raising the minimum wage and reforming campaign finance laws. "If he had never had brothers," adds Rep. Barney Frank, a fellow Massachusetts Democrat, "he would still have had one of the great careers in American politics."

A passionate advocate for liberal causes like universal health care and gun control, he has made friends of ideological opponents such as Simpson and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) and gained a reputation for building coalitions to get things done. "I honestly think that part of the reason he worked so hard was to fill his hours—to erase the pain of the loss of three brothers," says Bob Mann, a University of Texas at Austin journalism professor who was Kennedy's press secretary in the 1980s.

Divorced from Joan in 1983, he found it difficult to shake his reputation as a hard-drinking womanizer,

particularly after Easter Weekend of 1991, when, at a family gathering in Palm Beach, Fla., he roused son Patrick, then 23, and nephew William Kennedy Smith, then 30, out of bed to go to a bar. Events that night led to the lodging of rape charges against Smith. He was ultimately acquitted but only after a televised trial that left Senator Kennedy looking like an aging playboy. "I recognize my own shortcomings," said Kennedy in an October 1991 speech at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. "I realize that I alone am responsible for them, and I am the one who must confront them."

All but written off by political pundits, Kennedy came back like a phoenix from the ashes. In June of 1991 he began dating Washington, D.C., lawyer Victoria Reggie, then 37, the daughter of longtime family friends Louisiana Judge Edmund Reggie and his wife, Doris. The senator and Reggie wed in July 1992. "She has brought enormous happiness to my life," Kennedy said upon their engagement. She also brought him two stepchildren, Curran, 15, and Caroline, 13. Kennedy periodically drops Senate business to attend their soccer games and birthday parties.

But tragedy was never far away. On Dec. 31, 1997, nephew Michael Kennedy died in a skiing accident in Colorado. Then last month the family had gathered in Hyannisport for the wedding of Bobby's youngest child, Rory Kennedy, when word came that JFK Jr.'s plane was missing over the Atlantic. Teddy took charge, monitoring the Navy search for the plane and doing his best to hold the



Ted escorted niece Caroline Kennedy at her marriage to Edwin Schlossberg.



"He has a way of lighting up a room like no other person," a family friend says of Kennedy (at the 1993 wedding of Ted Jr., left, with John Jr., Patrick and cousin Tim Shriver).



"In a competitive family, he's been the rock," a friend says of Kennedy (with Vicki in '95).

family together during the awful vigil. (The wedding was postponed. See following story, page 83.) "He was very low-key, very somber," says Barnstable police Sgt. Edward Smith, who was with the family. "He sat on the front porch a lot, looking out to sea." Then the bodies were found. "I had never seen him as shaken," says Douglas Kennedy. "It affected him in a way that I have never seen before."

Still, it was Ted who tried to raise spirits following the Manhattan memorial service for John and Carolyn. At the reception he sat down amid the mourners and started singing old Irish tunes. "That's his character—let's put a smile on everyone's face," says longtime friend Don Dowd. "And that's what he did." In his eulogy for his nephew, Kennedy had offered words that could have referred to himself as well. "He had a legacy, and he learned to treasure it," he said. "He was part of a legend, and he learned to live with it."

- Thomas Fields-Meyer
- Macon Morehouse, Rose Ellen O'Connor, J. Todd Foster, Elizabeth Velez and Sandra McElwaine in Washington, D.C., Jennifer Longley in Hyannisport, Mark Dagostino in Boston, Fannie Weinstein in Miami, Chris Rose in New Orleans and Anne Lang in Austin

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