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GERRY DOHERTY'S BOOK

Anyone with an interest in the political history of Boston, of Massachusetts and of the United States should read a new book, "They Were My Friends – Jack, Bob and Ted." It is a memoir by Boston's most legendary behind-the-scenes political operative of the past sixty years, Gerard F. Doherty. And it is terrific.

It traces Gerry Doherty's life from his boyhood in his life-long home in Charlestown, to his years as an all-scholastic football player for Malden Catholic, his two-year battle with tuberculosis, his time as a state representative to his long professional and personal association with the three Kennedy brothers, Jack, Bob and Ted (Full disclosure: Gerry Doherty has been a long-time mentor to me, going back more than half a century to his days as chairman of the Democratic State Committee, when he hired a wet-behind-the-ears kid as a combination speech writer and PR person).

Do you want to know the inside story of Bobby Kennedy's near miraculous victory in the Indiana Presidential Primary of 1968, when he made a last-minute entry, faced with the open opposition of the state's governor, the political establishment and the media? Read this book because Gerry Doherty is the man who orchestrated that victory. Do you want to know what it's like when the President of the United States interrupts his busy schedule to have a dish of ice cream with you? Do you want to know what happens when Ted Kennedy wants to take a bath and you're riding with him in a car the middle of nowhere? Read this book.

Of particular interest is the behind-the-scenes story of the famous Teddy-Eddie debate of 1962. For those of you too young to remember (which is the majority of you - and of the world's population - since it took place more than fifty-five years ago) here is the background: When Ted Kennedy first ran for the United States senate his chief opponent was Massachusetts Attorney General Edward McCormack, who happened to be the nephew and surrogate son of Speaker of the House John W. McCormack. Think about that for a moment, the brother of the President of the United States facing off against the favorite nephew of the Speaker of the House - the two most powerful Democrats in America involved on opposite sides of a primary campaign. I'm still puzzled as to why no one ever made a major motion picture about it. To say that emotions ran high is like saying that Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton don't exchange Christmas cards, it doesn't begin to tell the story.

Eddie McCormack was the more experienced of the two candidates, he was just completing the second of two very successful terms as state attorney general, he'd made a name for himself and he was a very attractive candidate. Ted was just thirty years old, the bare minimum to serve in the senate, but he was not only a Kennedy, but also he turned out to be the most politically gifted of all the brothers, the one who most embodied the showman-like qualities of their maternal grandfather, John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, the

legendary two-term Boston mayor. For all the advantages Eddie had, Teddy's outweighed them.

As the campaign turned to the home stretch Kennedy had opened-up a lead but McCormack had one last chance - a debate was scheduled to be held at South Boston High School, McCormack's home turf. The venue appeared to be a mistake on the part of the Kennedy campaign but it was a stroke of genius; it set up Ted, the candidate with the most advantages and all the momentum, as the one going into the lion's den, the underdog. Did I tell you that the manager of Ted's campaign and the one who suggested Southie as the location was Gerry Doherty?

About the only issue separating the two candidates was this: Is Teddy Ready? He was. He'd been campaigning for months, he'd been boning up on the issues, and he'd been well briefed. In the debate he more than held his own. As it wound down to its conclusion, McCormack, clearly frustrated by his sinking campaign, delivered what he hoped would be a knockout blow. He turned to Kennedy and pointing an accusatory finger he literally snarled, "If his name was Edward Moore with his qualifications, with your qualifications, Teddy, if it was Edward Moore, your candidacy would be a joke, but nobody's laughing because it's not Edward Moore, it's Edward Moore Kennedy."

The drama of the surprise attack was breath-taking. The crowd in the auditorium sat for a moment in stunned silence but then, it being the heart of McCormack country, broke into wild applause. As for Kennedy, he was enraged and had trouble holding himself in check while delivering his closing statement. At the debate's conclusion the first person at Ted's side was his friend Gerry Doherty. The first thing Kennedy said was, "I'd like to go punch him in the nose." Doherty could see that he wasn't kidding and quickly hustled him outside before things got worse.

The crowd of McCormack partisans in the hall thought Eddie had delivered the knockout punch he needed, but it was Eddie himself whose candidacy and political career suffered most from his attack. To the hundreds of thousands watching on television he came across as mean-spirited and nasty. And people had learned to like Ted Kennedy. If McCormack's campaign was in trouble before the debate it was dead by the time it was over. It wasn't so much what Eddie had said that turned off voters, it was the way that he said it, with his lip curled in a sneer. The primary itself was an anti-climax. Kennedy won by a margin of more than two to one.

Teddy and Eddie were both professionals and good guys and they quickly patched up their differences once the campaign was over. In fact they became good friends in the ensuing years, even as their supporters held onto and nursed their grudges.

Post script: When Eddie McCormack died in 1997 those attending his funeral gasped when his eulogist rose to deliver his tribute to the deceased. It was Ted Kennedy. He won the congregation over, even the most skeptical, by declaring at the outset, "I've been baptized twice in my life. The first time was in Saint Patrick's Cathedral when I was a few weeks old. The second time was my baptism into Boston politics in 1962 when I ran against Eddie McCormack." The entire congregation broke into laughter and applause and so ended, thirty-five years after the fact, the Teddy-Eddie campaign.

Anyhow, do yourself a favor and read Gerry Doherty's book. You'll be glad you did.