

# The Shattering of Kennedy's Victory Party

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LOS ANGELES — There was a party going on in Sen. Robert Kennedy's suite on the seventh floor of the Ambassador Hotel on Tuesday night. In the early part of the evening it was not a very gay party. With 2 percent of the vote in, Sen. Eugene McCarthy was five points ahead.

Writer Budd Schulberg, looking woolly-haired and tweedy, chatted with "Paper Lion" author George Plimpton.

Mrs. Plimpton sat on the corner of a bed in the adjoining room talking to Jean Smith, wife of Kennedy campaign manager Steve Smith and sister of the senator.

Tanned and looking lovely in a silk dress embroidered at the neck, Mrs. Smith seemed to prefer the quiet of a few friends dropping by the bedroom than the chaos of the living room.

John B. Martin, former ambassador to the Dominican Republic, wandered from room to room looking serious and gnawing his pipe.

Film director John Frankenheimer, who made a very successful half-hour commercial about Kennedy, said he would leave for Kansas in the morning to start a new film.

## Discussing Movie

And Hollywood-based director and producer Dick Silbert lounged about discussing the movie he would start in Mexico in the morning.

With New York producer Bill Wilson and brain trust-writer Dick Goodwin, Frankenheimer and Silbert made all the TV commercials for the campaign.

Sitting on a couch in the living room was Col. John Glenn talking to Charles Evers, brother of assassinated Negro leader Medgar Evers. "I'm going to

Washington to help the Poor People's March," Evers said.

Evers had done quite a bit of campaigning on Kennedy's behalf in California. "Kennedy is the only one who can really deal with the problems," he said. "Something's got to happen. If we have Humphrey as president it will be like France in this country."

"Making of the President" author Theodore White padded about observing a crucial night in what looked increasingly like the making of another president.

At 11:45 NBC, despite its problems of broken computers, announced to everyone's delight that it joined CBS in the opinion that Kennedy would win.

## Gathers Momentum

Everyone wandered about laughing and drinking as the party gathered momentum with the candidate's success.

Word went out to friends of the senator's that a party was planned after the election at Los Angeles' gayest, most "in" nightclub, "The Factory."

Victory appeared imminent.

The senator entered the living room with aides Fred Dutton, Dick Drayne and Richard Goodwin. He made the rounds accepting congratulations and shaking hands. He looked young and tanned and glad to see everyone celebrating.

After a few minutes of visiting with friends he went downstairs to make his speech congratulating McCarthy on running a good race. His wife Ethel went with him.

## Enjoy His Jokes

In the living room of the Kennedy suite, speech writer Jeff Grenfield, 24, stretched out on the floor next to his wife in front of the television set and everyone gathered around to watch the senator and laugh at his jokes.

They looked pleased. Most of them had worked hard for that moment. The telephone rang constantly, usually for people who were not there and could not be found.

Suddenly the CBS announcer said, "Please clear the room." None paid much attention. Most people had been down earlier and seen the unbelievable jam of people in the main hall room. Bands were playing special Kennedy songs and people in Kennedy hats and extraordinary costumes were pushing and shoving and steaming under the hot TV lights.

"We cannot tell if the senator has been shot or not," the announcer said.

In both upstairs rooms people rushed to turn the volume up. "It can't be!" "Oh no!" "God, it's not possible," they exclaimed as the room emptied, virtually stumbling over one another in an attempt to discover if it were true. A few sat on the edge of the bed looking disbelieving.

Jean Smith hurried downstairs to join her husband and plead with people to leave the ballroom quietly and calmly. The lobby of the Ambassador Hotel was bedlam, lit as though for a movie production by strobe lights. A throng of people crowded out of the ballroom and stood about unwilling to leave, but with no reason to stay.

## Police Rush In

A young man standing by a blue fountain filled with balloons in the middle of the lobby gave a short speech telling people not to get upset.

Jesse Unruh, California campaign coordinator, said "My God, my God, do they have to do this to every decent man?"

Out of the Colonial Room burst a cordon of policemen carrying

their guns high and surrounding a doubled-up young man whose face was hidden from the light—the suspect.

In the ballroom police tried to cordon off the center of the floor where a woman lay stretched out on a table covered with blood, a large plastic tube beside her and a clutch of nurses and policemen around her. TV and still cameras mercilessly ploughed on until the police turned the lights off.

Upstairs, all the members of the Kennedy group had gone to the hospital. Left were only a few stalwart young women calling members of the family and friends to make necessary arrangements.

Mrs. John Braden, wife of San Francisco campaign manager Tom Braden and a close friend of Ethel Kennedy, left to stay with the children at Malibu until it was decided they should leave

for New York with Colonel and Mrs. Glenn.

A fat young girl in a Kennedy hat with tears streaming down her face caught anyone she could in the hotel halls to tell her story of the incident. Standing behind the assassin she saw him pull out the gun as the senator leaned forward to shake hands with a waiter who greeted him.

## In the Street

After the senator reached the Good Samaritan Hospital, everyone who was neither watching television at the Ambassador or actually in the hospital with the family and immediate friends was outside the Good Samaritan in the street. Masses of policemen filled the block. The air resounded with the drone of electric generators for the TV equipment.

The crowd—some press, some women with little children, even a couple of hippies—didn't say much. Occasionally members of

the staff appeared on the street, but without much news.

Sen. Edward Kennedy arrived. Later Andy Williams and his wife arrived. Tempers frayed as the policemen prodded people behind ropes they had put up.

When finally a cold, gray dawn brought press secretary Frank Mankowicz's announcement that the senator had survived the operation, spirits lifted slightly.

The Plimptons, Goodwin and a few other members of the staff left the hospital around 7. A coffee wagon brought a moment's energy. The television lights were turned off and daylight brought a smoggy, dank vigil to match the spirits of the watchers.

All that remained of the earlier revelries were the empty glasses on the 7th floor and a few balloons in the lobby.

"This would have been a terrific day," said Mankowicz.



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