

TURNING POINT

# A classical heroine

**J**UST 18 MONTHS AGO, JOAN Kennedy was reeling with unhappiness. Her nephew Willie Smith was accused of raping a woman during a wild Easter weekend in Palm Beach; her former hubby, Sen. Ted Kennedy, had orchestrated the boy's disastrous night out; and her youngest son, Patrick, was required to testify at the messy trial.

"That was a very difficult time for me," says Joan Kennedy, who had been arrested in May of that year for drunken driving. "If it had just been Senator Kennedy, I would not have been all that upset... but I was angry at the senator for bringing the kids along... to go out and drink and look for sex. Patrick was a victim of his dad saying, 'Let's go out.'"

Now the gloom has lifted. Willie Smith was acquitted, Ted Kennedy has remarried and Patrick Kennedy has been reelected to a third term in the Rhode Island legislature.

And Joan Kennedy, following a fifth stint in rehab, is a woman in renaissance.

"I'm feeling great, really good," exclaims the Kennedy heroine, now on a 14-city tour to promote her new book, "The Joy of Classical Music: A Guide for You and Your Family" (Doubleday, \$22.50).

The book is the product of a life-long passion that sustained the 56-year-old Kennedy through a multitude of family triumphs and tragedies.

"Music — listening to opera in the morning, symphonies in the afternoon and chamber music at night — has been a very important part of my spiritual recovery," she says.

A lifetime of piano lessons (she began at age 5) came in handy after her 1958 marriage to Ted, when she campaigned for him and brothers Jack and Bobby: "I would play 'This Land Is Your Land,' at political rallies and I felt wonderful."

Then came the assassinations: "It was total devastation, and none of the family had any therapy. We had each other, sympathy from all over the world, and I had my music."



Photo by Deborah Faingold

**NEW AUTHOR** Joan Kennedy

But following Chappaquiddick in 1969, the bottom fell out of her marriage. And after 1973, when her eldest son, Teddy Jr., lost his right leg to cancer, she increasingly turned to alcohol. "That was the worst time of my life," she recalls, tears filling her eyes. "The doctors said Teddy had a 20% chance of living beyond two years. I cried and cried..."

Though her son recovered, her drinking worsened.

"I have no excuses for drinking — it's an addiction, a genetic disease," one also afflicting Teddy Jr., who checked himself into rehab last summer. Going public with her own alcoholism in 1979 was, she says, "the gutsiest thing I ever did." She separated from her hard-drinking husband and moved to Boston, where in 1983 she earned her master's degree in music education.

"Breaking out of my marriage and going back to school gave me back my self-esteem — a lift, just like writing this book about music," she says. "That was the first time in my life I was on my own."

And nearly 10 years after her 1983 divorce, Kennedy says she's finally ready for romance: "I want to announce to the world that I am open to a relationship — all I ask is that he either love classical music or be willing to learn."

# All parents aren't created equal

**D**EAR ANN: YOU ASKED WHY children would ignore an 84-year-old parent who says, "I did my best." Well, here's why I ignore my 84-year-old father.

When I was 12, my father decided the family should move to a nicer house 50 miles from his job. The move was an expensive one and Mom had to go to work. Dad bought a new car for commuting while Mom walked a mile to the bus stop.

Dad spent his weekends at the track. If one of us was sick, that was Mom's responsibility. My sisters and I worked our way through college. Dad never gave us a dime.

Mom got cancer a few years after Dad retired, and everything that needed doing fell on me. When Mom died, he found himself a girlfriend, bought a new car and had no time for our calls. The last time I called and asked, "What have you been doing lately?" He replied, "None of your business."

This Christmas we won't worry that Dad is alone because he has his girlfriend and lots of stories to tell about how rotten his daughters are. — Carol in Calif.

**Dear Carol:** The mail on this has been depressing. So many family members are at each other's throats and have no interest in making amends. Read on:

**Dear Ann:** This is why one child (me) wants nothing to do with my 84-year-old parent. You asked, "How is this possible?"

We see mother twice a year. The woman is a hypochondriac, a whiner, a congenital pessimist, an inveterate nitpicker, a habitual corrector, a gossip, pushy, critical, outrageously demanding, controlling and manipulative. She is totally self-centered and

never did one damn thing for us kids. My father, who lived with her for 52 years, was a saint. — Richmond, Va.

**From Kansas City, Mo.:** You can't understand why a child would ignore an 84-year-old parent. Maybe I can explain by telling you what my father is like.

He came from a family with money and snubbed my mother's people who were of modest means but much finer than his clan — a bunch of drunks. He was hard on us kids and would knock us around for the slightest infraction. Once he beat my 11-year-old brother because he had stayed at the library until it was dark. He wouldn't stop though my brother's nose was bleeding and he could barely stand up. I stepped in and gave my father a sock on the jaw that sent him reeling. He never laid a hand on any of us after that.

Today, none of his sons has anything to do with him. We figure he has earned his loneliness.

**Los Angeles:** My mother, who is now 81, was always so partial to my older sister it was humiliating. She would say in front of people, "Poor 'Lenore' [me] is going to have a hard time in life because 'Jeanette' [my sister] is so much prettier. We will probably have to buy Lenore a husband." I grew up feeling ugly and unwanted. It took years of therapy to rebuild my self-esteem. I have forgiven my mother but I no longer see her. The pain of the past is too intense."

If you have questions about drugs, you need Ann Landers' booklet "The Lowdown on Dope." Send a self-addressed, long envelope and a check or money order for \$3.95 to: Lowdown, c/o Ann Landers, P.O. Box 11562, Chicago, Ill. 60611-0562. © 1992 Creators Syndicate



**ANN LANDERS**



**GLENN PLASKIN**

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ASK DR. BROTHERS

## Spacing avoids sibling rivalry

**D**EAR DR. BROTHERS: WE have a little boy, age 2, and think we should have another child. My husband seems to feel it's better to get the child-rearing over all at once, to have the children as close together as possible. Do you agree? — G.C.

**Dear G.C.:** No. While on the surface, that might seem like a nifty idea, it creates the likelihood of greater sibling rivalry. Some experts say that the ideal separation is five years. Two years between children is too close for comfort. Studies show that there's almost always an increase in jealousy between youngsters so close in age.

sition in the family before the age of 3, no matter how well parents try to prepare for the arrival of a new baby. By age 5, however, the thought of a new arrival might interest and even please the first child. A 5-year-old is deeply involved in learning, and the world is such an exciting place that a new baby in the house is less threatening.

I notice you say you "should" have another child. Remember, it isn't fair for parents to have a child simply because they're trying to provide companionship for an only child. Make sure you and your husband really want the child, for all the right reasons.

# SEARS

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