

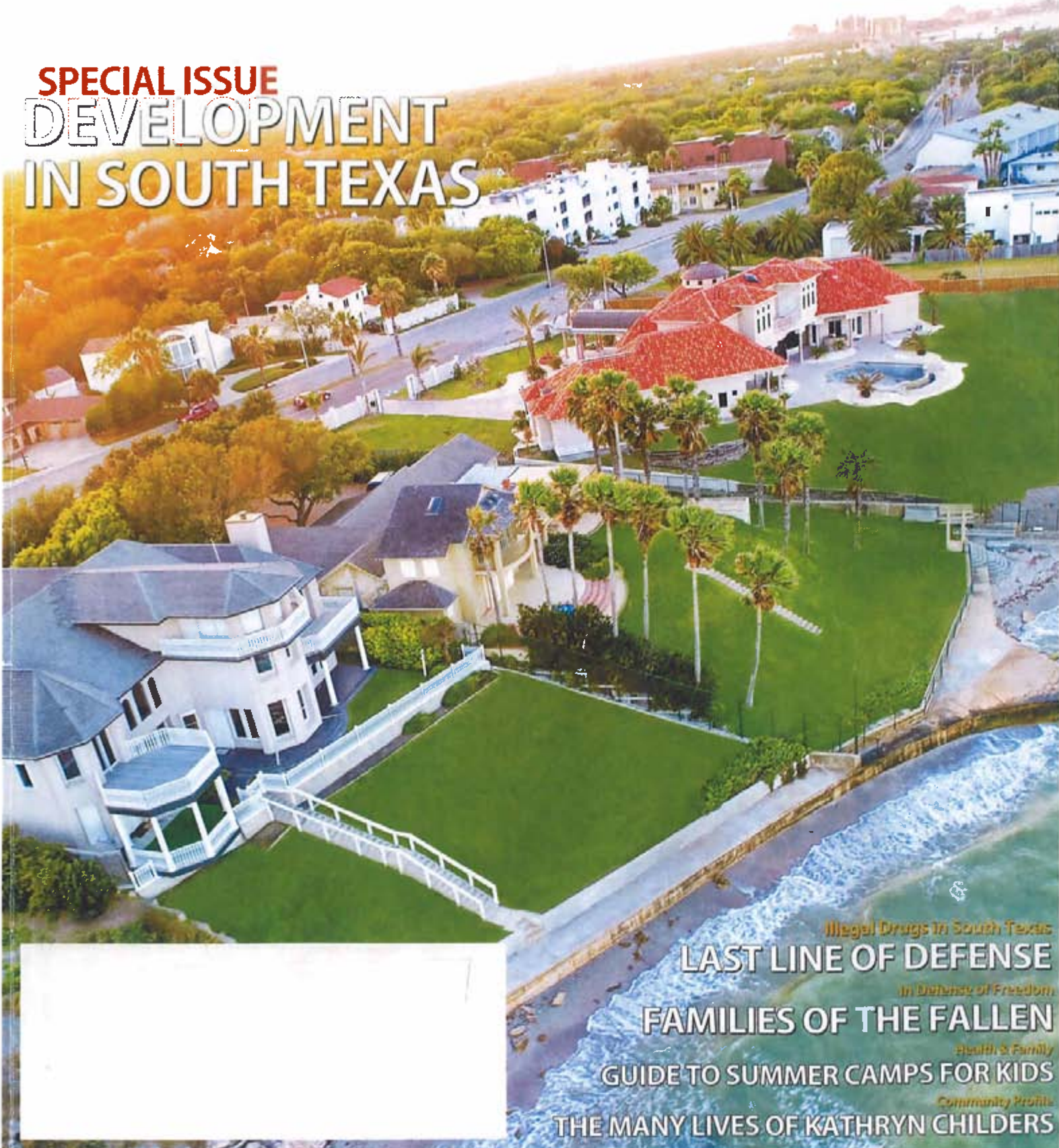
TEXAS COASTAL

SUMMER 2006

enthusiast

THE CORPUS CHRISTI BAY AREA'S MAGAZINE

SPECIAL ISSUE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH TEXAS



Illegal Drugs in South Texas

LAST LINE OF DEFENSE

In Defense of Freedom

FAMILIES OF THE FALLEN

Health & Family

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THE MANY LIVES OF KATHRYN CHILDERS

the Many Lives of Kathryn Childers



morning tv host
& celebrity interviewer

fund raiser
& philanthropist

civic leader

book publisher

mother & wife

protector of
presidents, royalty
and their families



interview & story
by damon gibson

To most South Texans, Kathryn Childers is known first as the morning television host whose “3 Magazine” show appeared on KIII-TV3 for almost 14 years—she was the one local personality who brought us big-time celebrity interviews with all the great stars of ABC television, from Dom Deluise and Robert Wagner, to Farah Fawcett and Lucille Ball. Most recently, Kathryn published the wildly-successful photo book chronicling the once-in-a-century weather event we will never forget, *Snow—The South Texas Christmas Miracle*.

What most of our neighbors don't know about Kathryn is her role as a pioneer, as it turned out, for gender equality in law enforcement, as one of the first five female agents in the United States Secret Service.

Born in Salt Lake City, Utah, Kathryn grew up in Pueblo, Colorado, with her parents and two older siblings in a decidedly traditional home, her father a farm and ranch appraiser and her mother a public

school teacher.

“Dad taught me casting while Mom encouraged violin,” recalls Kathryn of her formative years, “In 1965 there were no women's sports teams in my high school... but I could catch a football and play tennis, so the boys always picked me to play.”

By the time she was a senior in high school Kathryn was competing on the boys' tennis team, but because Centennial High School featured (of all amenities) an underground shooting range, it did sponsor a women's rifle team—and of course Kathryn was top-dog. At age 16, she was the NRA's top-ranked women's .22 gauge rifle national champion—at the same time she was also one of the first women on the national ski patrol team.

“My rifle coach always said, ‘A quitter never wins and a winner never quits,’ and I was never intimidated by the boys,” she recalls.

“But like most girls in my school, I was sent to college to earn my ‘MRS degree’—which meant I should teach elementary school so I could send my husband to

grad school,” says Kathryn, who graduated from the University of Colorado at age 20 with a degree in elementary education. “I got the degree but there was no husband,” she adds.

During the era, C.U. was known as a hotbed of liberal dissension, and Kathryn fit the classification, “non-militant conservative,” amid war protestors, bra burners and civil libertarians.

“After college I could tell I was not wanting to teach...I wanted an adventure before settling down and the women's dean suggested I go to Washington, D.C.,” Kathryn remembers. By the end of her first summer after college, she was hired as a military case worker for Colorado congressman Donald Brozman, and embarked upon a journey that she describes as, “one of the bravest things I ever did—I loaded up my 1959 Volkswagen Beetle (in 1969) and headed cross-country to Washington.” Quite an intimidating challenge, even today, for a single, 20-year-old young woman.

It wasn't long before Kathryn fell in love with D.C., “one day I was sitting at my

desk, looking out the window at the flag in front of the Capitol...I felt like I had finally gone to where things were happening."

Not long after her arrival, a friend told her that the Secret Service was hiring female bodyguards for the very first time, an effort to offer more effective protection to the First Lady, wives of heads of state and other female members of the first and second families. Recalls Kathryn, "I said to my friend, 'the Secret Service—oh, what do they do?'... I ought to apply for that, I can shoot!"

Many weeks went by with no thought about the application, until Kathryn received a call from Clint Hill, perhaps the most famous of all Secret Service agents—Hill was the man in black seen pushing Jacqueline Kennedy back into the presidential limousine after President Kennedy was shot in downtown Dallas.

"I was called in for the interview...and was asked tons of 'what if' questions to measure my judgment," she describes. Kathryn was asked to watch a movie simulating a field exercise with 'shoot or don't shoot' tests, followed by a detailed quiz designed to measure her observational skills. "For some reason I did well with it, and I don't know why really," says Kathryn. In short order she was sent for a physical at a firehouse with 500 male firefighter recruits,

"I said to my friend, 'the Secret Service—oh, what do they do?'... I ought to apply for that, I can shoot!"

and was ultimately selected as one of the first five women to enter the Secret Service, and the only civilian woman who was not a police officer.

Kathryn entered extensive Secret Service training in 1970, where alongside dozens of male recruits, she excelled at Jujitsu and other forms of hand-to-hand combat. She mastered the .357 Magnum—a weapon that was far more substantial than her .22 gauge rifle back home. She and her classmates toured the inner workings of the U.S. Mint, and learned how to make counterfeit money, as one of the service's key responsibilities is the protection of the U.S. Currency.

Most importantly, Kathryn embraced the unspoken vow of the Secret Service—to sacrifice oneself, if necessary, for one's protect-ee. "The final way your protect someone is with your own body," she explains, "most people think the vow only applies to protecting the president, but it also applies to anyone you're assigned to protect."

In the academy Kathryn says she did not feel treated differently because she was a woman, but, "my attitude was that I had to be as good as, or better than the men—in order just to be accepted you had to be better. But my sense of humor was better then being better, I learned."

Unlike male graduates of the Secret Service academy, these first five women were given a ranking less than that of full agent—in fact in 1970 there were no women in the



The Kathryn we all know—For 14 years she brought us exclusive local interviews with many of the biggest stars of the time on her morning show, "3 Magazine." Kathryn on air with Ed Asner (top), Dolly Parton (middle) and Dom Deluise (bottom).



Hot bad company - This January 1971 photo was published on the front page of the *New York Times*. (1) Kathryn seated behind (2) the Queen (Princess) of Spain, whom she was assigned to protect. (3) Vice President Spiro Agnew; (4) Neal Armstrong chatting with (5) Spanish Prince Juan Carlos about walking on the moon; (6) Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

FBI or the Secret Service. It was President Richard M. Nixon who elevated Kathryn and the other four female graduates to the ranking of 'agent,' in an effort to bring more women into federal law enforcement.

Assigned to the Washington, D.C., field office, Kathryn (Badge #007) and her colleagues often learned of their daily assignments on the day of the assignment, with operations ranging from personal protection to going undercover, sometimes in deep disguise, to work counterfeit currency stings and even to infiltrate political demonstrations and 'hippy love-ins,' as they were known in the day, for the purpose of investigating potential threats to the president.

At one point early in her career, Kathryn was assigned to protect Imelda Marcos, and later found herself in a sniper position atop a Washington office building during a state visit by Yugoslavian dictator Josip Tito.

Kathryn's most memorable assignments in the Secret Service were in the traditional role as bodyguard—and her experiences protecting some of the most fascinating and influential women of the era emboldened

her, in a way, and reminded her of the life-and-death nature of her duty. She understood the importance of her newly formed role in the agency, "Most people thought I was a nanny or a family friend. My thought was that [potential assassins] would take out the men first, and I would be the last line of defense."

But it was Kathryn's exposure to famous world figures that made her first feel part of the big picture, and perhaps gave her the confidence to walk alongside and converse freely with movie stars and other celebrities later in her second career. She chatted about the state of mankind in an elevator with Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and took motherly advice from Israel's Golda Meir, whom Kathryn describes as, "a tough and sturdy Jewish grandmother, right down to the role-up stockings."

One of Kathryn's most memorable experiences was her assignment to the royal couple of Spain during their visit to the U.S. in January, 1971. In a photo published on the front page of the *New York Times*, Kathryn is seen seated behind the princess and next to Mrs. Neal Armstrong, whose famous

husband is seated next to the visiting prince. "I could overhear Neal Armstrong describing to the Crown Prince of Spain what it was like to walk on the moon," she recalls.

On the same assignment, Kathryn mastered the art of being a feminine, 21-year-old young woman, while packing enough heat to fight off kidnapers and assassins. "At one point we were going 60 miles an hour in a limo the wrong way down Pennsylvania Avenue, and I thought to myself, 'Daddy, life doesn't get any better than this.' And then I realized I had an hour and a half to race home in my '59 VW Beetle and change into my college formal for a state dinner with the Spanish royal couple," she remembers.

"My problem was that I didn't have an appropriate, matching handbag for a snub-nose .357 revolver that weighed eight pounds, so I had to stop at Garfunkle's [department store] on the way to the dinner to buy a bigger handbag."

The glamorous side of Kathryn's job rose in all its glory during her first summer in the agency, when she

Mit Tennisschläger und Karate-Dame



Caroline in Mayrhofen: Sie trainiert oft, um ein Tennis-Champion zu werden

Auch wenn Caroline Tennis spielt: Ihre Leibwächterin ist immer dabei

Von P. MILLARD und P. SCHMALZ

Mayrhofen, 9. Juli

Eine „Karate-Dame“ die innerhalb weniger Sekunden jeden Mann „k.o.“ schlagen kann, ist Caroline Kennedys neuer „Schatten“. Sie ist die 13-jährige Schwester von Ad Onassis (65) selbst auf dem Tennisplatz nicht allein. Denn sie gehört zur „Leibwache“ der 12-jährigen.

Caroline, die zur Zeit in dem amerikanischen Spitzcamp von Mayrhofen (Tirol) für sechs Wochen Ferien macht, wird außerdem ständig von sechs „Gorillas“ beobachtet.

Caroline möchte in ihren Ferien ein Tennis-Champion werden. Ihr Lehrer, der ehemalige Wimbledonstar Bill Talbot zu Bild: „Das wird sie auch noch schaffen. Sie ist sehr viel Talent.“

Caroline darf in Mayrhofen aber nicht nur Tennis spielen. Gemeinsam mit 30 anderen Kindern aus amerikanischen Millionärfamilien muß sie auch Deutsch und Französisch büffeln. Jacky Onassis (41) kann sich in drei Wochen von den Fremdsprachen-Fortschritten ihrer Tochter selbst überzeugen. Dann gemeinsam mit „Art“ will sie zu einem Kurzurlaub nach Mayrhofen kommen. Der Großvater möchte dort Skifahren lernen.

Caroline K with Tennis Racquet and the Karate Lady reads the headline of this German tabloid, which published a series of photos of Kathryn at an Austrian tennis resort, warming up teenager Caroline Kennedy for her lesson (above). A target from a typical day at the firing range showing Kathryn's uncanny skill with a firearm (below).

was assigned to protect the children of President John F. Kennedy and the former first lady, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis.

“I was only assigned to protect John and Caroline,” recalls Kathryn, “because Mrs. Kennedy had remarried, she was no longer protected by the Secret Service, but the children were protected until they were 16.”

She first met the Kennedy children at Hickory Hill, home of the late Robert F. Kennedy and his widow, Ethel, upon the request of Caroline, then 14. “We were to be traveling together for four months...so she wanted to meet me.”

For the children, Kathryn was something of a novelty, as no female agent had ever been assigned to protect them. “I could kind of hear them snickering, ‘ah, she’s a girl—she’s going to be easy,’” Kathryn remembers. “My job was to keep [Caroline] happy, safe and alive, and from embarrassing the president or the country for that matter.

“I felt the pressure of protecting the children of the most revered man in the world, whose mother was then married to the richest man in the world—the kidnapping threat was immense”

To be sure, the position of Secret Service agent protecting the JFK kids in the early 70s had its moments, “I spent the better part of two summers on the Isle of Scorpions, where Onassis kept his yacht, *Christina*,” says Kathryn, “and since I only protected the children when they were off the boat, we had quite a bit of stand-by time on a very small island.”

During one of Kathryn’s many European junkets with the Kennedy’s, she was photographed by paparazzi at an Austrian tennis resort, on the court warming Caroline up for her lesson. A couple

of days later she was amused to see a photo of herself with the girl on the front page of a German tabloid—the headline is huge letters read (in German, of course), “Caroline K with Tennis Racquet and the Karate Lady.”

Kathryn remembers, “The day the story came out I noticed people stepping out of our way as we walked down the sidewalk.”

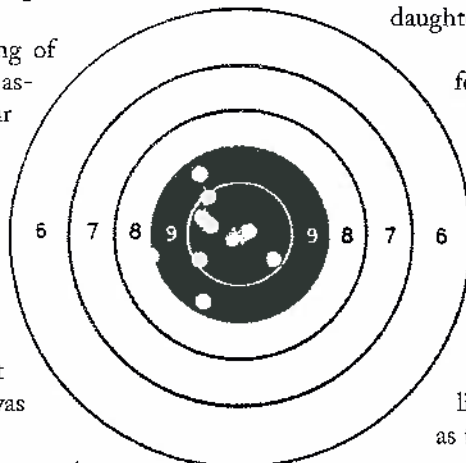
The cat was out of the bag—a mysterious female bodyguard, reportedly skilled at shooting and hand to hand combat, and not at all a bad tennis player—was protecting the beautiful, teenaged daughter of Jack and Jacqueline Kennedy.

One incident that was not at all glamorous, and for a young Kathryn was actually quite serious, occurred early in her professional relationship with the Kennedy’s. “I was driving Caroline to school in New York with several of her classmates when she decided to get out and walk.

“So here I am trying to follow them in the car—they were turning down one-way streets, laughing and finding it all very funny,” Kathryn recalls, “Finally I put the red [Kojak] light on top of the car and was rounding blocks as fast as I could—and I’d see them turn the other way when they saw me—I think I was panicking a little at one point.”

After school that day Kathryn caught up with Caroline to straighten out matters. “I said, ‘this is probably the last time you’re going to see me,’ and [Caroline] said, ‘why?’ And I said, ‘because I’m going to quit your detail,’ and she said, ‘why?’

“And I said, ‘you’re going to get the big, burly guy in the black suit again,’” Kathryn recalls, referring to the fact that she was Caroline Kennedy’s first and only female bodyguard.



"And so we made a deal for her to let me do my job, and she did."

Interviewing Kathryn Childers about her days in the Secret Service unveiled an astute, somewhat serious, and very devoted-to-duty side of her that is not as much reflected in the celebrity interviewer, mistress of ceremonies, or philanthropist-clown sides of her persona. It's the same kind of surprise as when a good friend whom you've known for years starts speaking Spanish out of the blue—and you had no idea your friend even spoke Spanish.

The funny part about Kathryn is that her "special talents" have to do with throwing herself in front of a bullet, taking down a sniper target from a thousand yards, and bringing an attacker to his knees by striking him in any of a dozen spots on his body.

What Kathryn makes most clear is the absolute value of discretion and privacy for

She chatted about the state of mankind in an elevator with Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, and took motherly advice from Israel's Golda Meir, whom Kathryn describes as, "a tough and sturdy Jewish grandmother, right down to the role-up stockings."

Secret Service agents. "I learned to be non-intrusive, and was therefore welcomed into situations that other agents were not," she explains. It's clear, even today, that the most private, personal events that she witnessed shall always remain private.

Over the three years of on and off detail to the Kennedy children, Kathryn frequently found herself politely disbanding well-wishers—in airports, at public events, on the street—as Mrs. Kennedy-Onassis, John, Jr. (who was called 'John-John' only in the media), and Caroline were so endeared to the hearts of the public, and were justly the recipients of great sympathy.

"Mrs. Onassis wanted her children to have some kind of a normal life, although she knew that was impossible," recalls Kathryn, "on the night that the Kennedy Center opened, John and Caroline were with me in Massachusetts.

"The kids were bored and begged me to take them to a drive-in movie. They had never been before—I went to the drive-in ev-

ery weekend growing up. So John, Caroline, their cousin Maria [Shriver] and two other cousins and I loaded up and went.

"So as we're driving up to the drive-in, they beg me to let them sneak in like other kids. I told them to hunch down and asked for one ticket from the clerk—and held up six fingers so he knew to charge me, as the kids were snickering in the back seat," Kathryn remembers.

"The last time I saw Mrs. Onassis was while I was protecting Senator [Ted] Kennedy—she asked me how I was, and in her soft, whispering voice said to me, 'oh, you live such an interesting life.'"

Kathryn's family connections to Corpus Christi led her here, and on a blind date with one Dr. Cecil Childers, while she was still an agent.

"We were on my sailboat," recalls Dr. Childers, a Corpus Christi psychiatrist, "and her bag fell onto the deck...and out rolled



this huge .357 Magnum!

"That was 28 years ago and I've been saying 'yes ma'am, no ma'am,' ever since."

Kathryn tells the tale of their engagement after a three year courtship, and her refusal to give up her career without a ring, "I was on the gun range in Uzi practice when I hear, 'Agent Clark you have an important call from Texas.' It was Cecil saying, 'Kate, Kate, I have the ring!'"

And here they are.

The tall, athletic girl from Colorado who grew up to work among the world's most interesting and celebrated people, in two completely separate careers—how does it happen, and what did that girl learn about life?

"I've gotten to do all these interesting and unusual things because I never turned down an opportunity—that's what gave me one of the most interesting jobs in the world!"

And she wasn't talking about interviewing Dom DeLuise. ☺