

Different Ballgame If She Had Won?

By MARCI SHATZMAN
Of The Bulletin Staff

THE PLANE from Detroit was a few minutes early.

May Camp, the soft-spoken head of Pennsylvania's Women's Political Caucus, smoothed down her hair and put on a fresh coat of lipstick.

"How've you been?" she smiled, extending her hand to a plain, dark-haired woman loaded down with parcels.

"I'm just comin' in from South Bend, Indiana, where I met with some migrant workers," Frances (Sissy) Farenthold explained, in a whispery Texas drawl. "I am," she admitted, pushing a lock of hair from her eyes, "a little bit tired."

A few years ago this 40-year-old Houston lawyer wouldn't have rated a chauffeured car and a welcome. She probably wouldn't have been asked to come here last weekend to speak at a conference of this state's women Democrats.

BUT LAST year, at the Democratic National Convention, 402 delegates casted their vice presidential vote not for the party's boy, Tom Eagleton, but for Frances Sissy Farenthold.

And the whole nation sat up and took notice.

"It would have been a whole different ballgame if she had won," someone said wistfully when Ms. Farenthold was at the podium Saturday night. Seemingly refreshed after a brief nap her almost inaudible voice had gained a forceful sit-up-and-take-notice wallop.

"I guess the thing that please me most about 1973 — aside from my election as the president of the National Women's Political Caucus," she told the crowd, "was being on Richard Nixon's enemy list."

"I guess someone WAS listening last fall when I spoke about the thugs in tailored suits," she said, recalling her earlier remarks about Watergate.

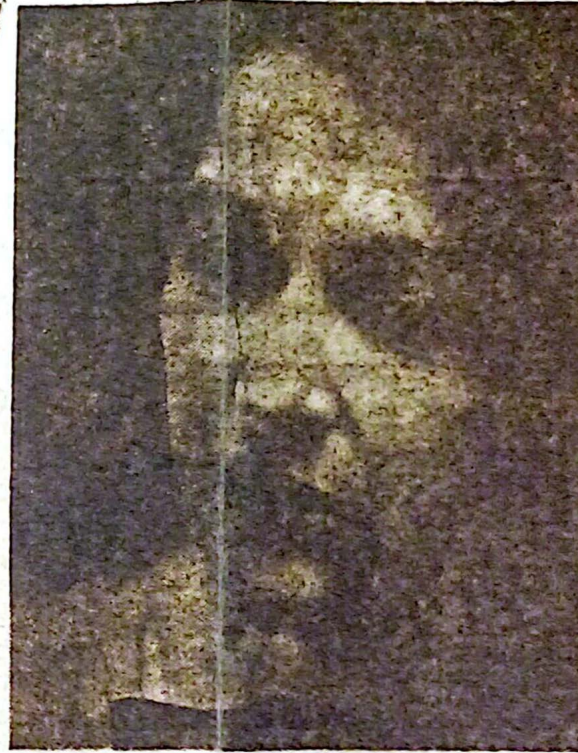
THE strictly partisan crowd loves it. And they loved her. As Ms. Camp had said in her introduction, "Sissy Farenthold is a woman on her way up."

Coming from the same moneyed, sheltered background and the same state as presidential counsel Anne Armstrong, Ms. Farenthold has emerged as the new darling of the women's movement — champion in her conservative home state of such unpopular causes as abortion, race relations, and health care. Just as optimistic liberal GOP women are looking to Ms. Armstrong and her outspoken aide Jill Ruckelshaus as political messiahs for the future, so, the Democrats are looking toward Sissy Farenthold. There even has been talk of the two Texan women facing each other next year in that race for governor.

"I just don't know," Ms. Farenthold said of that decision. "It would be a tough fight." Her 1972 bid at the Texas governorship developed into such a hard-nosed battle that she and the winner, Gov. Dolph Briscoe, haven't spoken a word since.

"I called him a bowl of pabulum," she smiled.

That is the Farenthold style. Neither flamboyant like her cronie New York Congresswoman Bella Abzug, nor cosmopolitan like Gloria Steinem, Sissy is low-keyed, deliberate and brutally frank.



FRANCES Sissy Farenthold, an outspoken lawyer from Texas and former Democratic vice presidential contender, is a political comer.

She told her audience that one of the things it takes to be a woman in politics is "audacity". Having served two terms in her state legislature she learned that the hard way.

"I thought it wouldn't matter that I was a woman," she said. "Boy, was I naive."

Right now Sissy — an ironic nickname for another of the women's movement's spitfires — is biding her time. She maintains a Washington office where she's oiling the unwieldy machine of feminist politics which has grown into the National Women's Political Caucus. She spends two days

teaching law at Southern Texas University.

And like most public figures these days, she spends more time in the air than a mallard. A "working politician" as she calls herself, she is a duck with one foot out of water. After raising five kids she went on to find nirvana in politics — a stream she's reluctantly out of "When you're a woman in politics you first get ignored, then comes ridicule and disparagement," she had said in her speech. "But if you have tenacity you can expect a beginning respect."