

Cokie Roberts

Memories of the Capitol

Recollections and personal memories of the House and the Capitol.

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I remember it, I remember it vividly. I mean, I was standing, you know—sitting or standing—on the floor, and they called the roll for Speaker. And everybody stood up and said, “Mr. [Sam] Rayburn, Mr. [Joe] Martin. Mr. Rayburn, Mr. Martin.” And I thought they were calling the roll of Members. Remember, I had just turned five like a week before. {laughter} This is an odd childhood. And I turned to my father, and I said, “There are an awful lot of Mr. Rayburns and Mr. Martins.” I guess they said, “Rayburn, Martin;” they wouldn’t have said, “Mr.,” but I said, “Mr. Rayburn, Mr. Martin.” And he, it took him a minute to catch on to what my confusion was, and then he explained what was going on. And I always remembered it and then when Mr. Sam died, I remember writing to my father and saying I was wrong, there weren’t...

But then a thousand years later, I was covering the State of the Union, and I was standing in Statuary Hall, and there was a new shot—a new camera angle that we had never used before—and it was down the center aisle at knee height. And I had this incredible qualm because that way my, it all just came rushing back. That was my earliest memory of the chamber, and there it was at the right height for me to see it.

But I still have moments in the Capitol where I will turn a corner, and something will just come rushing back, you know. And I’m 63 years old. And there’ll be times when I’ll turn a corner and, you know, sort of half expect to see my father. So it’s a very—a place redolent with memories, to put it mildly.