

“Grandmother Preserves One of U.S. History's Greatest Tragedies for Her Grandson”

By Sophie Grosserode

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Newspapers often have been referred to as history's first rough draft. And few front pages have been as memorable as the one a Maryville family has preserved for 55 years.

On Nov. 22, 1963, Phyllis Forester was working at the Levi Strauss plant in Maryville. It was the middle of her Friday afternoon shift when her boss's voice came over the intercom. President Kennedy had been shot. And he was dead.

“We were just in total shock,” Forester said.

Later that afternoon, a copy of *The Maryville-Alcoa Daily Times* was dropped on Forester's doorstep with the story of the century plastered across the front page.

She read it just like everyone else that day, and was so moved that she decided to save that edition.

“I kept it because, to me, it was history,” Forester said. “Then it was just something I hung onto.”

Forester folded the paper and put it, along with another metro newspaper from two days after the

assassination, into an envelope, where those pieces of local history sat unknown for decades.

Eventually, Forester passed the pages down to her grandson, Brandon Leitch, who was in high school at the time.

“He's a history buff,” Forester said. “He's always been that way.”

Said Leitch, now 22: “Since I'm a history guy, she wanted to give them to me. I have more use of them; I can appreciate them more.”

Leitch found a frame at a yard sale for the Maryville paper and displayed it, first in his dorm at Tennessee Wesleyan University and now in his office. Friends sometimes noticed it and asked if it was real, but still, few people knew about the increasingly rare treasure Leitch had in his possession.

Archived papers at the Daily Times office don't reach back that far, and neither Forester nor Leitch has ever seen another page like it.

Looking at the newspaper, now yellow with age but still in good condition considering its age, even Leitch, born over three decades after President Kennedy took his final breath, feels the significance of it.

“It kind of takes you back, I guess,” Leitch said. “This was like their 9/11. You’ve got kids who grew up and remember Pearl Harbor. You have kids who grew up and remember the Kennedy assassination. Then for us, growing up, we remember 9/11 too well, like it was yesterday. This is just like that. This is all just local history.”

That history means a lot to Leitch, and he knew it would mean a lot to others. He began this year to reach out to The Daily Times and the public library to share his treasure with his community.

According to Mary Elmore at the Blount County Public Library, artifacts like Leitch’s are exactly the kind of golden nugget the library display cases are made for. Elmore said people would be surprised how many calls the library receives with one-of-a-kind artifacts they want to display.

“Displaying historical documents here at the library is a major aspect of being a source of information for our community,” Elmore said. “It’s kind of like being a museum at the same time as being a library. We want to give our patrons, not just access to books and electronic things, but physical items as well that they wouldn’t normally have access to. Most of our display cases are booked six months to a year in advance for these types of displays.”

Added Leitch: “Just sitting on the wall in my office at home, nobody else can really appreciate it. Knowing that I may have the only one, and nobody else has really seen it, it just strikes me that this history is something that I need to give back to my community.”

The newspaper from the day of the assassination will be on display at the Blount County Public Library, 508 N. Cusick St. through Friday, Nov. 30.

Grosserode, Sophie. “Grandmother Preserves One of U.S. History's Greatest Tragedies for Her Grandson.” The Daily Times, TheDailyTimes.com, 22 Nov. 2018, www.thedailytimes.com/news/grandmother-preserves-one-of-u-s-history-s-greatest-tragedies/article_32be1e58-a9ce-5347-ab49-6b44435d0fbb.html. Accessed 29 Nov. 2018.