

Memories of November 22, 1963

John Kennedy's Assassination

By Forrest Brandt

My eight and nine o'clocks over, I raced from Derby Hall back up to the apartment I shared on Dodridge and Neil. I quickly packed my suitcase and headed back down Neil. It was just before noon and I was right in front of the Varsity Club when I stuck my thumb out.

What luck! The first car, a dark green 57 Plymouth coup with two fellow students in it, pulled over. The passenger jumped out, threw back the front seat and hollered, "Pile in." I no more than settled in the back seat when the driver spoke over his shoulder, "Someone took a shot at the President in Dallas. Just came on the news before we picked you up."

I don't know if my memory is playing tricks with me, but I recall having a great deal of concern over JFK's decision to go to Dallas. I believe that the apprehension was shared by other students and even by some reporters. Maybe that's why I wasn't shocked at the driver's words.

We motored along Lane Ave., through Upper Arlington, made the jump onto Olentangy River Road and then the quick right onto Rome-Hillard, passing the stone quarry and heading into open country. By now the news had taken over the regular programming. Walter Cronkite was confirming that the President had been taken to a hospital and it was believed he had been shot. We slowed down for the traffic light in London as the Cronkite confirmed that JFK had been shot, as had fellow passenger, Gov. John Connelly. Just outside Cedarville we learned that the Bishop of Dallas was on his way. We were in the middle of Xenia when Cronkite choked up, "It has now been confirmed that President Kennedy is dead."

That's when the shock finally set in on me. I was twenty, and though I had already lost some friends through car accidents and an undiagnosed heart condition, I believed I was immortal. By extension, Kennedy, who seemed to speak directly to us - the youth of America - seemed immortal too.

I don't know what we had for dinner. Mom, Dad and I sat silently watching as Air Force One touched down. Jackie, still wearing her blood-drenched pink suit, and President Johnson did an awkward dance as they stepped down the ramp and waited for the casket. Protocol had been thrown into a tin cup for the moment, the roles of Former First Lady and newly sworn-in President did not come naturally to either.

Protocol was the story for all of Saturday. The Buckeye game with Michigan was postponed, indeed all college games were pushed back. Pete Rozelle, the NFL commissioner, stutter-

stepped all day, until finally deciding that Kennedy, being a great fan of football, would want the games to be played on Sunday. By noon Ohio State had cancelled classes for Monday. My roommate, who decided to drive home on Friday night, called to offer me a ride back late Monday afternoon giving both of us the chance to watch the funeral.

On Sunday morning I was watching the news, live coverage of Lee Harvey Oswald being transferred from the Dallas Police Station into custody of the county Sheriff. Suddenly a man in a flip brim hat and an overcoat pushed his way in front of guards and the unmistakable sound of a hand gun roared from the TV set.

By now my sense of invincibility was taking on a much more mature perspective.

Monday came. The sounds of muffled drums, death knells, footsteps and hoof beats filled the background. Black Jack, a magnificent, spirited black stallion, pranced and shook his head fiercely as he followed the caisson and the flag draped casket. The stirrups held the backward facing boots of the deceased Commander in Chief. It was as if Kennedy's spirit was stirring inside Black Jack's flanks.

It was about this point that I glanced over at my dad. He was a burly World War II veteran and solid Republican who firmly believed that to spare the rod - in this case his leather belt - was to spoil the child. In all my years of living with him I had never once heard the words, "I love you," pass his lips, Not to Mom. Not to my older sister and certainly not to me. But on this day tears began to slide down his cheeks, a sob or two escaped from his mouth.

I'd like to tell you of how reverently I went about the whole long weekend. How I sat and contemplated the end of JFK's life, the loss of a husband and a father, and tried to connect to the great sorrow of the nation and the Kennedy family.

In truth I was no better than Pete Rozelle. Life was for the living I decided as I snuggled up with my girlfriend in the basement of her home. Our only fear was that her mom might grow suspicious and suddenly throw the door open. The understanding of the events and the sorrow would come to me much later in life.