

SO HOW DO AMERICANS REMEMBER THAT FATEFUL DAY IN 1963 ?



Here are three versions, not written for publication but simply in an exchange of emails... Thank you Tad, Jack and Kim !

Tad

Anybody want to share any memories? The president was pronounced dead at 1 PM CST on a Friday. So most of us, in the American Midwest at least, were in our first or third or fifth grade classrooms. But how did we find out? Did the principal go from classroom to classroom, open the door, and say "Stop that cursive handwriting lesson -- the president has been killed!" I don't remember.

I DO remember my teacher, Miss Birch, barking at me, because we had been told that "the president has been killed," not "the president has been shot," so I asked, "Do they know it was a murder, or was it something like the car roof falling in on him?" and she treated it like it was the stupidest question she had ever heard, which it wasn't.

But I guess I should give her a break. It was a tough day.

I also remember being in the car on Sunday morning two days later, my mother driving our 1962 Oldsmobile, containing her and me and my two little brat brothers. We were all going to St. Thomas Catholic Church in Palatine (my dad wasn't with us because he was a Methodist and went to a different church), and I remember EXACTLY where we were, on Rand Road, maybe a quarter mile northwest of Arlington Heights Road, if some of you know that intersection ... and we heard Jack Ruby murder Lee Harvey Oswald. Live on the radio.

My mother did a really good job of not driving off the road. I did see her white-gloved hands grip the steering wheel really, really tightly, and I got this little kid sense that she had a sense that the whole world she knew, and had grown up with, and understood, was beginning to unravel and unwind, right at that moment, right there on Rand Road, right there on live radio.

Which, after that weekend, for so many, in Arlington Heights, Illinois and in so many other places, it did.



JACK

After percolating for a few days about that day fifty years ago, this is what I came up with.

I remember that I was in my second grade classroom and that a voice came over the pa system. She told us that the president had been shot and that we would all go home. I don't remember anything else until later that day when, at home, we watched television in the middle of the day and mom was very upset. That was what got to me. Mom and all the other adults were very upset. When I think back, I realize that I had no context for what it meant that the president of the US had been assassinated. I continue to experience emotional upset whenever it's brought up but I know now that I was imprinted with the emotions of others at the time. They weren't my own, but have become my own.

A lot of other things happened until, 36 years later, on July 16, 1999, John-John died when his light plane crashed in the Atlantic Ocean. I was forty-three years old and worked with a bunch of college kids at a bookstore in Santa Cruz, CA. They were smart kids who knew the world around them. I asked them what they thought about 'John-John.' They knew that his death was a tragic accident, but only saw him as a man who was 'famous for being famous.' I asked them what that meant and they told me they thought he was a public figure in name only, with no successes to his credit. I told them that he had a few good works to his name, but what mattered more was the notion that there was a silent hope that maybe a little bit of the old man had rubbed off on him. This meant absolutely nothing to them. I asked them if they had ever associated the word 'beloved' with president of the United States. No, they hadn't. They came up with 'operator.' I told them that was what was missing. No one has come along since Kennedy who charged up a nation to go all the way to the moon and back, safely.

Today, I stopped for a moment at 10:28 am out here in LA. I was walking to work and stopped across the street from Hollywood High School. Around me were other pedestrians, mostly young adults. None of them had taken that moment to think over the past fifty years. And why would they. It's a moment in history and not a component of their personal lives.

Add it all up and I realize - after all these years, I miss JFK.

Nation pays tribute to President Kennedy on 50th anniversary of assassination



KIM

I'll share my JFK memories of 50 years ago.

Let's face it we were all very young, as for myself I was less than a month shy of turning 8, in second grade and living in Dallas (we had moved there from the northeast three years earlier) ! I believe someone came to our class room door to let our teacher, Mrs. Connors, know what had happened. She in turn tried to explain it to a room of second graders. The principal came onto the school speaker system and said a prayer.

I remember shortly prior to 11/22/2013 the adults at church were jokingly suggesting to another church member, who was a JFK look-alike, that he might want to stay home on the 22nd so he wasn't mistaken as the president because something could happen to him. Little did they know.

The memories I find most interesting are not my own, but my parents. My father worked in the city of Dallas and had left work, like thousands of others, to see Kennedy drive by. My father said there were some old buses bringing up the rear of the caravan carrying reporters and that when the shots were fired they all thought at first it was the buses back firing. Then a woman listening to a transistor radio told the crowd that the President had been shot. My father was not at Dealey Plaza but was close enough to see the Book Depository.

My mother, was at home and remembers listening to the radio and hearing that a Dallas police officer had been shot and killed ... not realizing at the time the connection to Kennedy. She remembers thinking how terrible for his wife and children.