

The Kennedy Assassination

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Hi, all,

I asked you to tell me about your memories of the JFK assassination. Here are the stories that came in. If this prompts others of you to send in yours, please do. As usual, I talked the most, so put my story at the bottom. It was a sad day in our history. Even sadder for me (and perhaps you) is that by the next summer, with the buildup of troops in Vietnam, the attitude of Europeans toward Americans really changed. Peter and I got tired of people telling us that we "weren't like" most Americans, who suddenly were seen as pushy. We kept saying, "We are Americans."

From John Olson (age 70)

It's not possible that Kennedy's death was 50 years ago. I was in a classroom at UM Dearborn waiting for an Instructor to give us a major test. He walked in the room and just stood there staring at us with the test papers under his arm. It seemed like minutes before he spoke. We knew something was wrong. The room was dead silent. Finally, in a whisper, he said "the President has been shot, class is cancelled." He dropped the exams in the waste basket and left the room. We sat there in shock for several minutes until someone said, "let's find a TV."

We rushed to the student center, as did the rest of the school, and gathered in front of the only TV on Campus. In the room with about 200 people you could hear a pin drop! I remember TV reporters fighting back tears, many moments of "dead air" as details were sorted out. The Nation came to a halt!

I have wondered if such a moment could ever happen again in this Country. We are so overloaded with information today that such a reaction would be hard to imagine. Let's hope that we never find out.

Sonja Cubalo Sarkisian (age 56)

I was, what, six? So I don't remember much, but I do remember coming home from school and my Mother had a different look on her face. She looked kind of upset and sad.

Lynn Cubalo VanderLinde (age 58)

I was in third grade and the teacher told us that the President had been killed. He was shot in the head. I volunteered that my Grandpa, my Dad's father, had been killed by being shot in the head. The teacher didn't really react to that.

Kathryn Olson Cubalo (age 80)

I was upstairs in the Inkster house, making the girls' beds. We had moved them upstairs when Mary K was born. She was in the little room downstairs. Lloyd phoned. I must have gone downstairs to answer the phone. He said, "You'd better turn on the TV. The President's been shot." I listened to the radio the rest of the day and was just kind of numb. I couldn't believe it had happened. Of course, we watched all of the events unfolding on the television during the days that followed.

Diane Piper Simmons (age 62)

I was on our way to History class when they made the announcement, probably from gym, don't remember. We got to History class and Mr. LaForge really got on our case about being disrespectful.....We hadn't heard the announcement. In Junior High you stayed with the same kids all day unless you had a special class like music or Spanish. We were horrified, to say the least. I don't remember the rest of the day in school but when I got home, my parent hadn't heard anything and we then turned on the TV. Later when they caught Lee Harvey Oswald and they were showing it live on the news I remember My mother saying "Somebody is going to kill him!" It wasn't two minutes later and he was killed on national TV. We watched the funeral on TV and my mother actually took a picture of it on the TV.

Helen Olson (age 76)

It was a Friday night in Augsburg, Germany where I was teaching American military children. My roommate Louise and I decided to go to the Officers' Club for a drink. I remember distinctly that I was sitting behind the table on a padded bench along the wall and that the Club had dark wainscoting. Some friends came by and joined us. Then a helicopter pilot, whom I'd dated a couple of boring times, came along and said, "Anyone with his hat on sideways has to buy the table a round of drinks." He'd just been promoted to Captain and, of course, had his hat on sideways. He slid in beside me and, as the drinks were arriving, said, "I just heard something funny. Someone said the president has been shot." Minutes later, an announcement came over the loudspeaker, "We regret to inform you that the Commander in Chief has been killed. We will bring you more information as we get it. I repeat, The Commander in Chief has been killed in Dallas, Texas." We all got up to leave, which seemed the only thing to do. As the pilot was helping me with my coat, I saw the pained look on the face of a dentist/actor named Joe Axelrod. He later became a good friend, but I didn't know him well then; I just remember the pain in his face. The pilot took me home. He wanted to snuggle; I wanted to go home; I prevailed.

As a Department of Army Civilian, I had free housing in Bachelor Officer Quarters, but we were expected to hire the cleaning women who "came" with the apartments. Ours, Frau Jaenish, had worked for military personnel since the end of WWII, after she fled her home in Upper Silasia ahead of invading Russian troops. She worked five mornings a week, cleaning, doing our washing and ironing, and even doing our dishes. On Saturday morning, she, along with the other women who worked in our BOQ, arrived with flowers and told us they would be putting candles in their windows. Germans tend to mark all occasions with window candles and candlelight parades.

The days that followed were somber and lovely. There was no American TV, so we were spared the barrage of TV coverage. The US Radio network played quiet and sad classical music, interrupted from time to time by news announcements. I remember a lot of Brahms. I regret that I didn't keep the copy of the *Stars and Stripes* that was delivered daily to our doorsteps. The headline said "The Commander-in-Chief Killed."

These were the years that Europeans, and especially Germans, loved Americans. Every time we stepped out into the city, strangers came up to offer their condolences. There was a candlelight parade downtown and a square was renamed *John F. Kennedy Platz*. There were soon Kennedy Platze and Kennedy Strassen all over West Germany.

Another teacher, the conflicted daughter of a Methodist minister, asked me if I would go with her to the base memorial service. I don't remember what was said at the service, but I do remember the very young, tall member of the Honor Guard standing at attention throughout the service with tears running unimpeded down his face.

Many years later, Peter and I were at an improvisational theater event at the Residential College where he taught. One group of students would form tableaux and then change their positions when a narrator called out a number. It became obvious that we were the only people in the audience who didn't know what it was about. The numbers referred to the frames from the home movie of the assassination seen over and over on American TV, with the students miming the positions of the Kennedys and the other passengers in the car. We had never seen the movie, which was so emblazed in most American's minds.

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