

Campus Members Share Memories of JFK's Assassination

Twenty-eight years ago, on November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was shot while riding in a motorcade in Dallas, Texas.

Almost three decades later, questions about his death still linger. Some facts about his assassination may never be known, despite formal investigations and commissions. However, as shrouded as some of these details are, most people old enough to remember that day recall it with great clarity. It somehow left its mark on them. Below are some of those recollections from members of our campus community.

Phyllis Moran, Secretary, Business Office: I was thirty-two years old, cleaning house, and watching "As the World Turns" at 12:30 PM. At first I was extremely irritated at the "News - Bulletin" interruption, until I heard why. Then I was horrified and started to cry.

Karen Monico, Instructor, Exercise and Sport Science: It happened during my senior year in high school. I was walking in the hall, going to English class when they made the announcement over the intercom. They sent us back to our homerooms and dismissed us as soon as the busses could arrive.

Adam Sorkin, Associate Professor of English: I was sitting in a barber chair in a three-chair barber shop in the "Collegetown" area bordering Cornell University campus in Ithaca, NY, where I was an undergraduate, while the barber was putting the finishing touches on a haircut.

He had a razor in his right hand — one of those straight razors barbers use — and he was smoothly shaving the hairs that grow on the back of my neck behind my right ear when the news bulletin, "The President has been shot! Unconfirmed reports from Dallas..." burst into whatever music was on. His hand jerked in shock, and I felt an annoying scraping sensation, but I wasn't thinking then about the possible slicing of my ear. A burning sense of horror dominated my mind, and a frozen fear about what the future would bring for the country, for the world, and yes, for myself. My own white-wrapped reflection in the barber shop mirror turned momentarily into the image of a draped corpse, and the chill was for me, too.

Jean Palladino, Accounting Clerk, Finance: I was in Miss Irons' 3rd grade class, and the principal came in and told us. Miss Irons started crying, and school was let out. I went home & my Mom was crying, which upset me, but I remember going outside to play, delighted that school was let out early.

Elizabeth Crocco, French/Spanish/English Instructor: Twenty-eight years ago, the news was no news to me. I was probably too busy concentrating on those words I could pronounce well and

making sense out of those I still had to learn. I am sure that my parents fussed a lot about the event that day, but in such a way that it did not reach me directly, nor indirectly.

Folkert H. Kadyk, Instructor, Music: We were in the middle of a high school band rehearsal when the announcement was broadcast over the public address system. Neither I nor the members of the band could believe it. Our general reaction was "this couldn't be true." (We spent the next three days learning music appropriate for a memorial football show and making black drapes for all the drums.)

Sibyl Severence, Associate Professor, English: I was sitting on the floor in our playroom with Carol, three, and Steven, one. We were building a block city and were in the midst of making the UN building out Legos. The kitchen radio was on. When I heard the news, I was horrified — and then I was swept with the irony of our constructing a building symbolizing oneness, peace, and reason.

Joan Robertson, Secretary, Academic Affairs: Driving my two children home from school in our little VW, my reaction was one of disbelief. Someone was playing a cruel joke, and we would all laugh about this in a minute or two.

Tiz Griffith, Instructor, Exercise and Sport Science: I was teaching P. E. at Norristown Sr. High and a co-worker came to the gym and told us. The students and I began crying. The entire school was dismissed. I went home and sat down at my TV and didn't move for days. On Sunday, my husband and I went for breakfast at his parents', which we had in front of the TV, only to witness live the shooting of Oswald by Jack Ruby. It was three days that I will always remember.

Bruce Stephens, Associate Professor, Religious Studies: I was a second year student in The Theological School of Drew University, and I remember distinctly walking across the beautiful campus and sharing the news of Kennedy's assassination with Professor H. Gordon Harland, my advisor and favorite teacher.

Norma Notzold, Lecturer, Education: I was in the dentist office, giving a friend support because she was petrified of dentists. When it was first announced that he had been shot, my immediate reaction was that, of course, he would be fine; he would not die. I was wrong.

Janet Alwang, Lecturer, English: I was sitting at the kitchen table in our house in Glastonburg, Connecticut. My friend, Barbara Mitchell, stood over me, rolling my hair in curlers. She was giving me a home permanent. My dog suddenly barked. We looked up and there stood the bread man, knocking on the back door. I got up, walked over

to the door, opened it, and, in his distraught state, the bread man almost fell into the room. "Kennedy's been shot. I just heard it on the radio in my truck." Bobbie and I both laughed. We were waiting for the punch line. We lived in a conservative neighborhood where a lot of Kennedy jokes had been making the rounds. When we finally realized the man was joking, we just stood there. For a long time.

Mary Gergen, Associate Professor, Psychology: I was teaching at a high school in Minneapolis. When the news came that the President was shot, we really didn't know he was all but dead. The seventh graders cried and were sad. The next class of eighth graders (mostly a class of boys) began to make jokes (I think they were trying not to cry). Strangely, I was totally composed until I went home. For the next days, I (and everyone I knew) stayed glued to the television to see the tragedy unfold. Images are still very vivid in my mind.

Alex Pendragon, Ass't. Regional Director, Development and University Relations: I was four years old at the time. I was with my mother. I remember she had the television on in the living room and people on the TV were running round screaming, crying, and acting very upset. My mother cried and was visibly shaken by the news. I remember she called my father on the telephone, and he came home from work early. I felt scared and confused and very sad, but I was never sure why until I was much older.

Michael Iezzi, Mail Clerk/Driver: I was twelve years old, and I was in the hospital with a broken leg. I remember watching television when they announced that President Kennedy had been shot and killed. I remember the doctors and nurses coming into the room to watch the news on T.V. And seeing people crying and being very upset, I was sad too, especially after seeing the President in my neighborhood a few years earlier when he was campaigning for the Presidency. I also remember watching all the news and the funeral on T.V and seeing how it made everyone in the world sad.

Nancy Trainor, Secretary, Student Programs and Services: I was just out of high school, working at Westinghouse. I had just come back into the office from the shop, and everyone was crying. We all just sat quietly for the rest of the day.

Jane Cooper, Associate Professor, Biology: I was in the Houston Hall Bookstore at the University of Pennsylvania, just browsing. At first I thought it was a horrible joke (there were lots of Republicans at Penn). Then I realized that the dream which had even me believing that the

political process could be exciting and positive was dead. A few years later so were Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy. Videotape about any of three of them still makes me weep. Whatever the human flaws that have been revealed since, those three men made many of us think that a good government is obligated to do good things for the poor, the differently able, the disenfranchised. I am bitter that so many are determined to prove otherwise now.

Jo Buckmaster, Assistant Professor, English: I was in an advanced calculus class. The teacher announced JFK's assassination and kept on teaching. I walked out of a class for the first and last time in my life, went home, and got in bed with my two little girls. We sang songs, and to this day, we all three cry whenever we hear "I'm a Little Teapot."

Michael DeRosa, Associate Professor, Chemistry: I was a senior at the City College of New York, and I was in the middle of an analytical chemistry lab. The first news that we got was that Johnson had been shot! There was a great deal of confusion as to what had happened, and the lab continued on. When we learned that JFK had been shot, there was a great deal of disbelief and confusion. Students milled around, trying to find out what had happened and what it meant now that Johnson was President.

Mary Matus, Senior Instructional Services Specialist: I was in my seventh grade science class, taught by a crew-cut young male teacher, Mr. Porter. (He was fair-skinned, and the blood would rise to his head when he became agitated or excited.) The message was delivered via classroom phone in private to Mr. Porter. He immediately blanched and urged us to put away class materials and listen for an announcement over the P.S. The class' reaction was to fidget, giggle, and pray that "the news" was a fire in progress or similar conflagration that would mean early dismissal. His anger at our foolishness reddened his faced. It was clear that something terrible had occurred. Properly chastened, we listened carefully to the P.A. The walk home was never more of a struggle.

Diana Grant, Records Clerk: I was coming out of a class at William and Mary College and heard the slow toll of the ancient bell in the Wren Building. Then I watched a wave of silence wash over the usual campus frivolity as the news spread. When I heard what had happened, I was incredulous. "Presidents aren't shot in this day and age!" From that time on, everyone was glued to the "tube."

Priscilla Clement, Associate Professor, History: I was in the

Continued on Page 11