

First Lady's Impressions: Drift of Pink Blossoms--Then Bloodstains

WASHINGTON

The text of a statement by Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson submitted July 16 to the Warren Commission investigating the assassination of President John F. Kennedy follows:

The White House,
Washington,
July 16, 1964.
The Honorable Earl Warren,
The Chief Justice
of the United States,
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. Chief Justice: Mr. Lee Rankin, chief counsel to the President's commission on the assassination of President Kennedy, has advised me that the commission would be interested to have a statement from me concerning my recollection of the events of Nov. 22, 1963.

Beginning on Nov. 30, and for two days, I dictated my recollection of that fateful and dreadful day on a small tape recorder which I had at the Edms, where we were then living. I did this primarily as a form of therapy—to help me over the shock and horror of the experience of President Kennedy's assassination. I did not intend that the tape should be used.

Tape Transcribed

The quality of the tape recording is very poor, but upon considering your commission's request, I decided to ask that the tape relating to Nov. 22 be transcribed. I am sending the transcription to you with only a few, minor corrections. Perhaps it will serve your purposes. I hope so. In any event, it is a more faithful record of my recollection and impressions than I could produce at this late date.

Please accept, for your and members of the commission and its staff, my thanks and best wishes for the important task which you have undertaken and to which all of you have so generously dedicated yourselves.

Lady Bird Johnson
Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson

(Transcript from Mrs. Johnson's tapes)

It all began so beautifully. After a drizzle in the morning, the sun came out bright and beautiful. We were going into Dallas. In the lead car,

President and Mrs. Kennedy, John and Nellie, and then a Secret Service car full of men, and then our car—Lyndon and me and Sen. Yarborough. The Dojezos were lined with people—lots and lots of people—the children all smiling, placards, confetti, people waving from windows. One last happy moment I had was looking up and seeing Mary Griffith leaning out of a window waving at me. Mary for many years had been in charge of altering the clothes which I purchased at a Dallas store.

Then almost at the edge of town, on our way to the Trade Mart where we were going to have the luncheon, we were rounding a curve, going down a hill, and suddenly there was a sharp loud report—a shot. It seemed to come from the right, above my shoulder, from a building. Then a moment and then two more shots in rapid succession. There had been such a gala air that I thought it must be firecrackers or some sort of celebration. Then, in the lead car, the Secret Service men were suddenly down. I heard over the radio system, "Let's get out of here," and our Secret Service man who was with us, Ruf Youngblood, I believe it was, vaulted over the front seat on top of Lyndon, threw him to the floor, and said, "Get down."

Sen. Yarborough and I

→ faster and faster. Then suddenly they put on the brakes so hard that I wondered if they were going to make it as we wheeled left and went around the corner. We pulled up to a building. I looked up and saw it said "hospital." Only then did I believe that this might be what it was. Yarborough kept on saying in an excited voice, "Have they shot the President?" I said something like, "No; it can't be."

One Last Look

As we ground to a halt—we were still the third car—Secret Service men began to pull, lead, guide, and hustle us out. I cast one last look over my shoulder and saw, in the President's car, a bundle of pink, just like a drift of blossoms, lying on the back

seat. I think it was Mrs. Kennedy lying over the President's body. They led us to the right, the left, and onward into a quiet room in the hospital—a very small room. It was lined with white sheets, I believe.

People came and went—Kenny O'Donnell, Congressman Thornberry, Congressman Jack Brooks. Always there was Ruf right there, Emory Roberts, Jerry Kivett, Lem Johns, and Woody Taylor. There was talk about where we would go—back to Washington, to the plane, to our house. People spoke of how widespread this may be. Through it all, Lyndon was remarkably calm and quiet. Every face that came in, you searched for the answers you must know. I think the fact I kept seeing it on was the face of Kenny O'Donnell, who loved him so much.

It was Lyndon as usual who thought of it first, although I wasn't going to leave without doing it. He said, "You had better try to see if you can see Jackie and Nellie." We didn't know what had happened to John. I asked the Secret Service men if I could be taken to them. They began to lead me up one corridor, back stairs, and down another.

Meets Jackie

Suddenly I found myself face to face with Jackie in a small hall. I think it was right outside the operating room. You always think of her—or someone like her—as being insulated, protected; she was quite alone.

I don't think I ever saw anyone so much alone in my life. I went up to her, put my arms around her, and said something to her. I'm sure it was something like, "God help us all," because my feelings for her were too tumultuous to put into words.

And then I went in to see Nellie. There it was different because Nellie and I have gone through so many things together since 1938. I hugged her tight and we both cried and I said, "Nellie, it's going to be all right." And Nellie said, "Yes; John's going to be all right." Among her many other fine qualities, she is also tough.

Then I turned and went back to the small white room where Lyndon was. Mr. Kilduff and Kenny O'Donnell were coming and going. I think it was from Kenny's face and Kenny's voice that I first heard the words, "The President is dead." Mr. Kilduff entered and said to Lyndon, "Mr. President."

It was decided that we would go immediately to the

airport. Quick plans were made about how to get to the car, who to ride in what. It was Lyndon who said we should go to the plane in unmarked cars.

Getting out of the hospital into the cars was one of the swiftest walks I have ever made. We got in. Lyndon said to stop the sirens. We drove along as fast as we could. I looked up at a building and there already was a flag at half-mast. I think that is when the emergency was what

help her, so I went to the left and went back to the main part of the plane where everyone was seated. The ride to Washington was silent, I think — with his own thoughts. One of mine was something I said about Lyndon a long time ago — that he's a man in a tight spot. I remember one little thing I said in that hospital — "Tell the children to get Secret Service men to them." Finally, we got to Washington, with a cluster of people waiting. Many bright lights. The casket went off first, then Mrs. Kennedy. The family had come to join them, and then we followed. Lyndon made a very simple very brief, and — I think — strong talk to the folks there. Only about four sentences, I think. We got in cars, we dropped him at the White House, and I

had happened first struck me.

When we got to the airplane, we entered airplane No. 1 for the first time. There was a TV set on, and the commentator was saying, "Lyndon B. Johnson, now President of the United States." They were saying they had a suspect. They were not sure he was the assassin. The President had been shot with a 30-30 rifle.

On the plane, all the shades were lowered. Lyndon said that we were going to wait for Mrs. Kennedy and the coffin. There was discussion about when Lyndon should be sworn in as President.

There was a telephone call to Washington — I believe to the attorney general. It was decided that he should be sworn in in Dallas as quickly as possible because of international implications, and because we did not know how widespread this incident was

as to intended victims.

Judge Hughes Called

Judge Sarah Hughes, a federal judge in Dallas — and I am glad it was she — was called to come in a hurry.

Mrs. Kennedy had arrived by this time and the coffin, and there — in the very narrow confines of the plane with Jackie on his left with her hair falling in her face, but very composed, and then Lyndon, and I was on his right, Judge Hughes with the Bible in front of her and a cluster of Secret Service people and congressmen we had known for a long time — Lyndon took the oath of office.

It's odd at a time like that the little things that come to your mind and a moment of deep compassion you have for people who are really not at the center of the tragedy.

I heard a Secret Service man say in the most desolate voice and I hurt for him, "We never lost a President in the service," and then Police Chief Curry, of Dallas, came on the plane and said to Mrs. Kennedy, "Mrs. Kennedy, believe me, we did everything we possibly could."

We all sat around the plane. We had a first been ushered into the main private presidential cabin on the plane — but Lyndon quickly said, "No, no" and immediately led us out of there; we felt that is where Mrs. Kennedy should be. The casket was in the hall.

I went in to see Mrs. Kennedy and, though it was a very hard thing to do, she made it as easy as possible. She said things like, "Oh, Lady Bird, it's good that we've always liked you two so much." She said, "Oh, what if I had not been there I'm so glad I was there."

Caked With Blood

I looked at her. Mrs. Kennedy's dress was stained with blood. Her right glove was caked — that immaculate woman I was caked with blood, her husband's blood. She always wore gloves like she was used to them. I never could.

Somehow that was one of the most poignant sights — exquisitely dressed and caked in blood. I asked her if I couldn't get someone to help her change, and she said, "Oh, no. Perhaps later I'll ask Mary Gallagher, but not right now."

She said a lot of other things, like, "What if I had not been there. Oh, I'm so glad I was there," and a lot of other things that made it so much easier for us.

"Oh, Lady Bird, we always liked you both so much." I tried to express something of how we felt. I said, "Oh, Mrs. Kennedy, you know we never even wanted to be vice president and now, dear God, it's come to this."

I would have done anything to help her, but there