

Bronson memory brings pain

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After filming the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Charles L. Bronson was moved to write the following letter to his seven sisters:

Memory is a most blessed and wonderful thing, but when a world-shaking tragedy of such national and international significance and implications has been indelibly stamped deep within the recesses of the mind by seeing with the eyes that horrible event, then memory haunts you incessantly and robs you of restful sleep.

Frances (Mrs. Bronson) and I were eyewitnesses to that untimely and awful event from a distance of 50 or 60 yards.

That morning at breakfast, I told her of my plans that would see the fulfillment of a dream harbored since boyhood — getting to see the president of the United States and his first lady, waving and smiling.

The newspaper Thursday had given a detailed map of the parade route and the timing of events from the moment the president landed until he was to depart. The parade was to take place during the noon hour and since Frances had to take Alice (a daughter) to church in Oak Cliff to meet a party who were motoring to Bethany, Okla., I

asked her to meet me at the Union Station parking lot at about 12:10 p.m. I left work about five minutes before the noon hour and in about 15 minutes I met Frances and we parked the cars and walked about four blocks to that little park area at the foot of Elm, Main and Commerce streets.

If you will recall, Houston Street intersects Elm, Main and Commerce and also runs parallel to the railroad tracks. Two triangles are formed by the three streets with Houston Street at the base of the triangles and the triple railroad underpass marking the apexes of the two triangles. Stone colonnades and a banister or abutment on either side are across the head of the triangular park areas which slope down towards the triple underpass. On either side of Main Street in the park area are these stone abutments, the highest of which is four and a half or five feet high and about two feet by five feet in area on top.

We chose the one on the left (as viewed from those in the parade) as it not only afforded us a full view of Main Street down which the parade was to come, but we could watch it make the right turn on Houston Street over to Elm and left on Elm Street down to the underpass. For some reason there were

less than a dozen people from the colonnade area on Elm Street down to the underpass which really gave us an unobstructed view of that point.

I suppose that the reason for the scarcity of people at that particular place in the parade route was that for one thing you would be downhill and couldn't see any part of the entourage until it was right in front of you and the other reason was that this spot was just beyond the main downtown area where thousands upon thousands were jammed. So this area marked the end of the parade. And, indeed, "the end of the parade" took on a double meaning at this point.

Frances tore one of her hose climbing on top but it was worth it. She said she was going to save it as a souvenir of that day in history.

There was another couple that we shared this vantage point with as we had plenty of room and an unobstructed view.

We only had 10 or 15 minutes to wait until they were in sight and I took one shot with my Leica and then used my movie camera as they approached and made the turn on Houston Street. Frances had been viewing through the binoculars and as the parade got to the corner she wanted me to take the

11-26-78 DMN

after seeing 'awful event'

binoculars so I could get a good view of Jackie in her bright pink suit highlighted by a brilliant Texas sun. But I told her to keep watching through the binoculars while I took the pictures. I don't know how many I took with my Leica, three, four or, at most, five.

But I was taking one with my Leica as they were about halfway down to the underpass . . . and then it happened! My first impression was parade — celebration — fireworks when I heard the first two shots ring out in rapid succession and a slight pause before the third shot rang out. My next thought was that the Secret Service men had no doubt fired at someone who was about to cause real trouble. I remarked to Frances, "Is that fireworks or is someone shooting?"

As I said, I was looking through the viewfinder all the time the parade was en route so I couldn't see any details. But right after my remark, Frances said, "President Kennedy is bent over and Jackie has her arm around him and Governor Connally is lying down."

Then I looked and saw a few people lay flat on the ground just as the presidential car stopped for a split second and then take off. I told Frances, "Let's get out of here before we get caught in

some crossfire." And we did. We heard someone say, "Oh, President Kennedy is shot."

As we hurried to the cars, we tried to believe that if it really were gunshots that we heard that no one in the presidential car was hit. We turned on our car radios as we headed for home and the plant and it was just a matter of a few minutes that we learned that both the president and the governor were hit. But somehow it was just too unreal to believe that such a thing could happen on such a beautiful day here in our beloved city of Dallas.

Shortly after I got back to work did we learn that President Kennedy was dead and the governor was critically wounded. And what a terrible feeling came over me as I thought that just a few minutes ago I was getting to see the president of the United States and his first lady smiling and waving to cheering Dallasites numbered in the thousands. Three loud shots were still echoing in my ears, and, yes, indeed, the parade was over.

Whether we want to face facts or not, one era in our national history was ended with that first shot of deadly accuracy. Another day is dawning. Just what is in store we all wait in anticipation.

Whatever our political views might be, we all must admit that President Kennedy was one of the world's great men. But that keen mind of his that was able to absorb so much through his eyes and ears and that mind that was so capable of generating ideas and plans and making them known by the mouth and pen was snuffed out as easily as the flame of a candle is blown out. All because one man skilled in his art succeeded in his diabolical plan of hate and grudge.

As you study the assassin and the assassinated, you have two men at the opposite extremes of society. Both were highly successful in carrying out their plans. But the one was egocentric in what he desired in life and President Kennedy embraced the world. Both had nerves of steel. But the one had a heart of brass and our president a heart of flesh. And you could go on and on in pointing out their similarities and contrasts that are brought into such sharp view from this time.

I know you are all praying that God in His infinite wisdom, mercy and grace will see us through in these days of national and international tension.

Lots of love,
Charles