
John F.

Kennedy: Those

President John F. Kennedy was assassinated ten years ago this week in Dallas.

The articles reprinted here, remembering him and recounting those tragic days, were written by Mary McGrory of The Star-News staff. They first were published on Nov. 23-26, 1963. The article "What We Shall Remember . . ." appeared as an editorial on Nov. 23, 1963.

Recalling the dash, glamour, glitter, charm . . .

He was just home from the Pacific when I first saw him in 1946. He was thin as a match and still yellow from malaria.

But he was blithe and determined and wherever he went he was surrounded by young men who felt with him that the Irish had something more to give to American political life than a last hurrah.

The hard-eyed pros didn't like him much. "Harvard Irish," they scoffed. The backers of the other four contenders for a seat in the House said sourly he would buy his way in with his father's millions.

BUT HIS FOLLOWERS, who from the first regarded him as one of themselves — and yet above them — said, "He's class," or, because the word can be either a noun or an

adjective in Boston, "He's got class."

He was 29 then, but with his hollow cheeks and tousled hair, he looked years younger. He thought a hat would help as an earnest of maturity, but he never could remember to bring one. One of his aides usually had to give him his own before they rushed into a meeting.

Handsome, graceful, surefooted, he moved around the tenements of Everett and Charlestown, dazzling the housewives with his wide smile, impressing the men with his grasp of the facts, leaving one and all wondering why, with all he had, he should want public office.

Solemn and statistical on the platform, he was, on the ground, casual and gay. "See you soon," he said once, ending an interview. "I have to go down to the firehouse and press a few palms."

HE WON THE HOUSE SEAT and soon challenged Henry Cabot Lodge for his place in the Senate. Always a man for the direct confrontation, he was delighted to have a debate with the incumbent. He came on, composed as a prince of the blood, chestnut thatch carefully brushed, facts straight, voice steady.

"Look at him," breathed the proud Irishman next to me in the excited audience. "He's a thoroughbred."

When he decided to go for the presidency, he went about it with the patience that was so at variance with his restlessness of body and spirit.

The most rational of men, he was intolerant of a lack of political realism. The grinding primaries irritated and tired him.

ONCE HE VOICED a melancholy doubt. He had come back late from a fruitless early foray into California where Gov. Pat Brown was being both obdurate and coy. He stood on the edge of an airfield, his imperially slim figure outlined in



the landing lights and the lights of the aircraft.

"My days are in the yellow leaf," he quoted somberly.

"Why does Hubert do it?" he asked late one night in the corridor of a hotel in Oregon in February 1960. He was referring to Senator Humphrey's bid for the presidency. "He can't make it. I like campaigning, but this is just a waste of time."

In West Virginia, I remember him standing on street-corner platforms before hungry, unemployed miners. "I need your help," said this darling of fortune to those desperate men. They gave it to him.

The morning after his election, I greeted him on the lawn of his father's house in Hyannis Port. He was carrying Caroline piggy-back.

Later that same day, I saw him display the only emotion he ever revealed in public. He was claiming the victory. He made a little speech — "not much longer, Jackie," he said to his pregnant wife. His closest aides were clustered around the foot of the platform. Tears stood in his eyes.

WHEN HE CAME TO the White House, suddenly everyone saw what the New Frontier was going to mean.

It meant a poet at the Inauguration; it meant swooping around Washington, dropping in on delighted and flustered old friends; it meant going to the airport in zero weather without an overcoat; it meant a rocking chair and having

the Hickory Hill seminar at the White House when Bobby and Ethel were out of town; it meant fun at presidential press conferences.

It meant dash, glamor, glitter, charm. It meant a new era of enlightenment and verve; it meant Nobel Prize winners dancing in the lobby; it meant authors and actors and poets and Shakespeare in the East Room.

When he made his first trip to Europe in May, 1961, he arrived at Orly and was firmly taken in hand by the lordly president of the Republic. Making his way across the field, he spotted the familiar faces of the White House press corps. He waved to us, a low surreptitious, under-handed wave which somehow conveyed his whole situation.

HE LOVED BEING President. He wanted to bring moderation, balance, flexibility — his own qualities to it. He told me he thought his cabinet was a more harmonious group than Roosevelt's, a source of pride to him.

The only time I ever heard him brag was about the White House garden.

I saw him at his last press conference. He was invited to castigate Congress. But this most rational man refused. It was not his style. Instead, he quoted from a poet:

"But westward, look, the land is bright." To the end, he was hoping that reason would prevail.

They were waiting at the airport . . .

It was his last airport arrival.

The field was garishly lit, as it had always been, by landing lights and television light. A misty quarter moon was rising over Andrews Air Force Base.

There was a crowd, as always. At the fence were gathered several hundred people, uniformed men of the Air Force and their families. There was even a camera or two.

There were high officials of the New Frontier. Undersecretary of State Averell Harriman, face gaunt and drawn, stood at the head of a disconsolate line. With him were new Postmaster General Gronouski, HEW Secretary Celebrezze, Undersecretary of Commerce Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr., Supreme Court Justice Arthur Goldberg and his wife.

THE LEADERS OF THE SENATE were there, Majority Leader Mansfield, and his weeping wife, Majority Whip Humphrey of Minnesota, who told of how the President, just before he left for Texas, had told an aide he feared for the life of President Betancourt of Venezuela.

Senator Aiken, Republican of

Vermont, who used to counsel a young senator from Massachusetts from the office across the hall on farm legislation, was there and Senator Inouye from Hawaii, and Senator Pell from Rhode Island were with them. Minority Leader Dirkson was trying to tell, above the usual airport racket, of a White House meeting scheduled for 7:15.

Off to the side stood aides of Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas, who had been sworn in as President on the plane that was bringing the tragic party home.

Secretary of Defense McNamara was by himself, looking off into the distance. McGeorge Bundy, the President's foreign policy adviser, was carrying a dispatch case under his arm.

THEODORE C. SORENSEN, the President's young special counsel, looking white-faced and stricken, was unseeing and unhearing in the night-marish light and noise.

The dean of the diplomatic corps, Ambassador Sevilla-Sacasa of Nicaragua, by habit took his place at the head of a little cluster of diplomats

who were milling about uncertainly. There was one tall African, stately in his native robes.

A few minutes after 6, an honor guard of six young enlisted men marched smartly forward. A gray Navy hearse backed up to face the waiting crowd. A cargo lift, a large rolling platform with a high yellow frame, was rolled into position.

At a few minutes after six, United States Air Force 1, all white and blue, landed amid a deafening roar. The back door was flung open. But this time there was no familiar graceful figure, fingering a button of his jacket, waiting to smile, waiting to wave.

INSTEAD THE LIGHT FELL on the gleam of a bronze casket.

And around it, sharply outlined in the yellow frame of the cargo lift, stood the old guard of the dead President.

The light played on the bald head of David Powers, the President's pal, and his first political mentor, who 18 years ago towed him around the three-decker flats of Everett and Charlestown, when a slender young Navy veteran was starting on the glory road.

On the other side of the bronze casket stood Lawrence F. O'Brien, since 1961 the President's congres-

sional liaison man, but in the old days his chief organizer and vote-counter.

Behind him was P. Kenneth O'Donnell, who would have died for him, and who had watched over him every step of the long campaign trail that led to the White House. At the foot of the coffin, white gloves sharp against her black suit, was Evelyn Lincoln, his secretary from the years in the House.

The men picked up their inexpressible burden and placed it on the top of the platform, and it was lowered into the hearse.

THEN IN THE FRAME stood his wife, Jacqueline, in a rose-colored suit with black facings. By her side was his favorite brother, Robert, the Attorney General, who had somehow gotten onto the plane although he never left Washington. He was holding Mrs. Kennedy by the hand.

She was lifted down from the platform and opened the door of the gray hearse and climbed in the back. Bobby followed her.

Several minutes later, the new President walked slowly down the ramp with his wife.

With tears on their faces, the leaderless men of the New Frontier went up to greet him.

