

Ten years later:

Where Were You?

ESQ - '73

Nobody forgets

Walter Cronkite was reading the teletype . . .

I was preparing my Evening News broadcast and just happened to be leaning over the teletype machine when the first bulletin came in from Dallas.

As would any newsman in a similar situation, I ripped off the copy and ran for the announce booth to get on the air with the then frightening, soon to be horrible, news.

Thereafter, I was on the air without interruption for the first six hours of the unfolding story.

So transfixed was I with the tragedy and the need to keep reporting despite my personal feelings that I did not realize until I was relieved from the anchor desk that I was still in shirt sleeves although my secretary hours before had draped my jacket over the back of my chair.

Bob Hope was in bed . . .

On November 20, 1963, I received an envelope from the White House. It contained a picture of President Kennedy and me that was taken at a dinner a couple of weeks prior. I had the photo, which was personally endorsed by John Kennedy, framed and placed it on top of my bedroom television set on the evening of November 21. On the morning of November 22—it was morning in California—I was awakened from sleep by the ringing of my private phone. I answered and a friend just said, "Bob—turn on the television"—and hung up. I hit my remote-control switch and saw Walter Cronkite telling of the death of J.F.K. in Dallas. Right above Cronkite's image on my screen was the framed photograph of the President and me. I'll never forget that moment as long as I live.

Charles Percy was in Chicago . . .

At noon on November 22, 1963, I was at the speaker's table at the Executive Club of Chicago. I was on their Executive Committee, was at the time Chairman of the Board of Bell & Howell Company, and had participated in bringing my longtime friend, and at that time Congressman, Robert Taft to Chicago for a speech. The subject of Bob Taft's talk, as I recall, was "Our Federal System of Government." A part of the theme of his speech was the remarkable continuity of government that we have provided through war and peace, prosperity and depression, civil war and world wars. We received notification while Bob was

talking of President Kennedy's assassination. In fact, the chairman of the program interrupted Bob's talk to make the announcement.

Congressman Taft continued his talk on a subject that could not have been more appropriate.

Arthur Ochs Sulzberger was discussing Presidential security . . .

I was at luncheon with some of my associates from the news and editorial departments here at The New York Times. Our luncheon guest that day was Michael J. Murphy, New York City Police Commissioner.

We were, believe it or not, discussing the tremendous difficulty of guarding the President of the United States when he came to New York City. Clifton Daniel, then managing editor, was called to the telephone, where he was told that the President had been shot. Needless to say, that was the end of the luncheon.

Archie Moore was lunching at Lindy's . . .

At the time of President Kennedy's assassination I was sitting having lunch at Lindy's restaurant in Times Square with Madison Square Garden matchmaker Harry Markson, discussing my future bouts with Rocky Marciano, Harold Johnson and Bobo Olson. A lady rushed into the crowded dining room shouting: "They've killed him! The President is dead!" It seemed the stunned diners at first refused to believe the truth of this woman's hysterical statement, but then the radio confirmed her story with fragmented reports and the people began to murmur vehemently and asked why such a terrible thing should happen to such a notable, personable and likable man who had done so much good for America and whose life had been snuffed out before he could fulfill his destiny.

Then suddenly I heard the voice of a man at the next table say: "Good. They ought to have done it long ago." I was infuriated, as was Harry Markson, and I had to physically restrain Harry from attacking this man who departed hurriedly before somebody who might be unable to restrain himself did him bodily harm.

As the radio reports continued, the sense of loss that gripped the people was absolutely indescribable. It was in their choked and hushed voices, and I felt a sense of loss as I did also after the deaths of Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy and Malcolm X.

Gerald Ford was driving to his office . . .

The afternoon of November 22 my wife and I had taken our second son, who was then ten years of age, for academic testing. On the way back to the office we heard on the radio the news of President Kennedy's assassination. Upon my return to the office I was contacted by many in the news media for my comment.

Within the next twenty-four to forty-eight hours, President Johnson personally called me to ask if I would serve on the Warren Commission. I indicated to him a heavy work load in the Congress as a member of the Committee on Appropriations but said I would assume the responsibility under these unfortunate circumstances. I did serve as one of the seven members of the Warren Commission. It is my considered judgment that the decisions and recommendations of the Warren Commission are more valid today than at any time in the past.

Julia Child was in the kitchen . . .

My husband Paul and I were lunching in our kitchen around one-fifteen on November 22, 1963, sopping up the remains of a soupe de poisson with the remains of one batch of experimental French bread, while another was rising. Avis DeVoto telephoned.

"Turn on the television—Kennedy's been shot!"

"What?"

"Kennedy's been shot! I think they've killed him! Turn it on!"

She hung up. We turned it on, just as the limousine was drawing up to the hospital door.

And we never turned it off. . . .

Billy Graham was on the golf course . . .

In late October, a prominent Texan confided to me that he was concerned and troubled about the President's forthcoming visit to Texas. For some strange reason, I had an unusually heavy burden about this. On November 13, I tried to reach the President through a mutual friend in the Senate. I really wanted to say to him, "I hope he doesn't go to Texas." There was a mix-up and the message never got through. Maybe God was trying to tell us something. I don't know, but I will always wonder about that. On the following Monday, my foreboding increased and I discussed it with Calvin Thielman, the pastor of the church in Montreat, North Carolina. It all