

Bobby Kennedy's assassination recalled

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LOS ANGELES

Jimmy Breslin, then of the New York Post, sat down at the next typewriter and muttered to himself, "Pretty dull story; what can I write about?"

It was mid-evening on June 4, 1968, in the Ambassador Hotel press headquarters for Sen. Robert F. Kennedy. He was running for the Democratic nomination for president in the California primary, and election night seemed as routine as when I covered other candidates: Adlai Stevenson, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, George Murphy.

The Embassy Room rocked with the same noisy hoopla. The band played "California, Here I Come."

Film stars orating about the New Camelot. The crowd cheering the returns as Kennedy pulled ahead of Eugene McCarthy.

Toward midnight a press aide came into the press room to announce that Kennedy would be coming downstairs to deliver a victory speech, then would answer reporters' questions in the press room.

Should I return to the Embassy Room to report the speech? I decided to wait for the press conference rather

Editor's note: On June 4, 1968, AP movie columnist Bob Thomas took time out from his Hollywood schedule to pitch in on a routine political assignment. He was to staff an election-night victory party. The candidate was Bobby Kennedy, and the story turned out to be one of the biggest of his career.

than risk getting caught in the crowd. The AP office could cover the speech on TV, while Kennedy's comments to the press would not be televised.

At the end of the speech I waited for the candidate's arrival at the door of the kitchen through which I had passed all evening.

Then screams.

I rushed into the kitchen.

In the nightmarish scene I perceived athletes Rafer Johnson and Rosey Grier struggling with someone. Shouts and wails reverberated through the room. A cluster of people huddled in a circle, and I couldn't see over their heads.

I jumped atop what I thought was a table (later I discovered it was a stack of kitchen trays) and peered down at what caused their horror.



Sirhan Sirhan, left, convicted in slaying of Robert F. Kennedy,

Robert Kennedy lay on the floor, blood streaming from his head, blank eyes staring into the void.

After watching the scene for a few seconds, I jumped down and ran to the press room. The telephones didn't work!

I knew the hotel layout, and hurried to the telephone booths in the lobby.

"Kennedy has been shot."

"Are you serious?" asked the editor at AP election headquarters.

With some difficulty I convinced him it was no hoax and began dictating an account of the assassination.

Midway through the story I heard an uproar in the lobby. Leaning out of the booth, I could see a score of police hurrying a swarthy young man down the marble staircase. I dictated a description of the presumed assailant.

It is 10 years later, yet I can still remember the events of that night as clearly as yesterday's interview.