

JIM BISHOP

The JFK Books



ONE OF THE premonitions which beset John F. Kennedy was that he was leading a group of amateur authors. He was the first President to ask his entire official family to take an oath not to write about their experiences in the White House.

In November 1963, he was martyred by a young malcontent on a lunch hour, as casually as a boy might take aim at a tin can in an empty lot. At once, all literary vows were declared invalid, and the scourging whips of words hit the national conscience as the Kennedy group began to pound out books by the dozen.

The sad, sweet charm of this young man was thrust against our eyes in newspapers, magazines, books and television documentaries. His noble ideals, his aspirations for America, were drowned in petty apologies for his mistakes. The situation was sick.

It became sicker. Robert Kennedy, a man who hoards his enemies, tried, with the support of Mrs. John F. Kennedy, to control the flow of material. The first book out, after the Associated Press and United Press International had scratched the surface with *Four Days* and *The Torch Is Passed*, was written by a man named Buchanan and was called *Who Killed Kennedy?* It was a runaway best seller in Europe because it hinted boldly that there was more to the assassination than Oswald and a rifle.

Then Mrs. Kennedy wrote a sentimental memoir for *Look Magazine*; Robert wrote a new foreword for *Profiles in Courage*.

Once weeded, the Kennedy clan sought out literary agents and were transmuted from belligerent politicians into authors with suitcases full of sentimental adjectives. Ted Sorensen, the moody speechwriter, worked on a book. Arthur Schlesinger, a truly professional writer with the mind of an analyst, worked on a book.

Pierre Salinger, Kenneth O'Donnell, Evelyn Lincoln and many others raced toward the spinning presses.

I plan a moment-by-moment book on the assassination, a project which will require years of work but, the moment I started, obstacles were dropped before me. Robert Kennedy met two men from Random House and asked why they would publish "the Bishop book." Evelyn Lincoln, President Kennedy's personal secretary, wrote that she was sorry, but that she could not give me any information.

MRS. JOHN F. KENNEDY sat at lunch with Bennett Cerf of Random House and wept, asking Cerf not to publish my book. Then she wrote to me, asking me not to write it. The reason, it seems, is that she had "hired" someone else. I have never heard of hiring a writer, but so be it.

It is tasteless and cruel to profit by a lady's personal agony, but the official Kennedy family goes on publishing. She talked about a time when "the pain is not so fresh" and the words sting.

My book will not be published when the pain is fresh. It's a long way off. By the same token, no one will be able to pay me a retainer to suppress it. . . .