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A Day That Triggers Memories

NOVEMBER 22ND 2011 BY UNKNOWN

A Day That Triggers Memories

By Annabeth Miller

It's one of the dates that are a trigger for memories. You remember how old you were, what you were doing on anniversaries for the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the night man first walked on the moon, the attacks on America on 9-11, and the day President Kennedy was killed

On this date in 1963, President John F. Kennedy was fatally shot while riding in an open-top car through Dallas. The world as we knew it changed forever.

Some of us were too young to actually be told at school – there were still some things that schools let families handle. So on that rainy Friday afternoon a group of mothers were on hand outside first grade classrooms – ready for kids who normally walked to school. Adults talked in hushed tones; sadness and shock was everywhere.

Older students were told of the momentous event by their teachers. Teachers cried. Heads bowed. At Dexter High School a hastily created mimeographed slip of paper was passed out for students to take home – not everyone had television to learn the news of the assassination of the President.

Brother Joe was just a freshman at DHS, but after school he headed to the Post Office to snap a photo of the American Flag flying at half-mast. There was a prayer service that

evening in town, for the community to gather together, and grown-ups gathered to pray, to talk and ponder the state of the nation.

And thanks to the advent of television, America stayed glued to the news coverage all weekend. We watched as the young president's body boarded Air Force One for the last time, saw his widow keeping her hand on the casket as it arrived in Washington, saw the lines and lines of people to see their last respects. I specifically recall young Caroline and her mother kneeling by the casket in the Capitol Rotunda. And, yes, that day of the funeral we watched that iconic moment, when young John Kennedy Jr. saluted his father's coffin leaving the cathedral.

On Monday, a television set was brought to first grade at Southwest, and all the students watched the pomp and somber funeral procession and service. We watched the Blackjack – the riderless horse who symbolized a fallen leader - with black boots backwards in stirrups and anxious among the proceedings.

The assassination of President Kennedy stunned and horrified the nation. Journalist James Reston wrote 48 years ago, “America wept tonight, not alone for its dead young president, but for itself. The grief was general, for somehow the worst in the nation had prevailed over the best. The indictment extended beyond the assassin, for something in the nation itself, some strain of madness and violence, had destroyed the highest symbol of law and order.”

Today's world is different. As a nation we have gone through so much since that day 48 years ago. But in 1963 there was a respect – for the office of President, for the man, for the country. The moment has worked itself deep into the American psyche.

But now, all these years later, the late President's daughter, Caroline Kennedy, will use the occasion of this anniversary to present the John F. Kennedy New Frontier awards honor Americans under the age of 40 who are changing their communities and the country with their commitment to public service. A good way to mark a momentous day.

Annabeth Miller is a Dexter native and editor of the ShowMe Times.

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