ASSASSIN KILLS KENNEDY

Most Stores Will Close Tomorrow

Sniper Bullets Wound Texas Gov. Connally

Johnson Is Sworn In As 36th President

Activities Are Canceled In Mourning

Friday, November 22, 1963

All Schools Will Suspend Classes

McFall Asks Rededication By US To American Ideals

Stanislaus District Churches Set Memorial Services For President
REACTION TO THE ASSASSINATION

STANISLAUS COUNTY

First Reaction

News of President Kennedy’s assassination swept quickly throughout Stanislaus County the morning of November 22, 1963. The assassination occurred at 12:30 p.m. Central Standard Time (CST), which was 10:30 a.m. Pacific Standard Time (PST). The Modesto Bee reported that switchboards at its office, Modesto City Hall, and Stanislaus County Courthouse were swamped immediately after the news of the shooting. Most telephone calls were to relatives and friends who were at work and had not yet heard the news. Pacific Telephone Company representative remarked that long distance lines were jammed and local calls were placed on an emergency system. Additional personnel were called to work. An official of Walston and Company in Modesto reported that the New York Stock Exchange closed at 11:15 a.m. PST, followed by the other stock exchanges across the nation.

Modesto churches began planning special services. Some decided to dedicate a segment of their Sunday services in remembrance of the President. Many had already opened their facilities for those wanting to pray and needed solitude. The first at Modesto High School to hear about the assassination were social studies students, who were watching a television program in the school library. Word spread quickly when a regularly scheduled fire drill brought students together outside. At Downey High School, students eating an early lunch were the first to hear while listening to radios and or watching television. At Davis High School, a special bulletin was sent to every classroom announcing the assassination, with students and faculty gathering to listen to radios or to watch television. Turlock public schools and Sacred Heart Catholic School closed for the afternoon. Turlock High School rescheduled a drama performance for another Friday. Stanislaus State College (SSC) canceled all afternoon and evening classes. Flags throughout the county were lowered to half-staff.

The most common words used by county residents to describe their reaction were “stunned,” “shocked,” and “disbelief.” The Bee remarked that “there was in the words of everyone contacted after the shooting an uncertainty, a strange unreality of voice and reaction, as the people tried to grasp the enormity of the crime that had been committed.” Many were horrified, angry, and perplexed. State Assemblyman John G. Veneman, Stanislaus County Republican, told the Bee that “It’s such a shock at this point that it’s almost unbelievable. I can’t imagine what would motivate anybody to do something like that.” State Senator Hugh P. Donnelly, Stanislaus County Democrat, remarked to the Bee that he was “so shocked that I can’t even think. It’s a deplorable thing. I can’t imagine anything worse at this particular time. The President took a desperate chance when he went south, because of the feeling against him down there. He was certainly courageous.”

A shaken Modesto Mayor Pete W. Johansen expressed to the Bee that “I am shocked and surprised and disgusted. I am grief stricken, as I am sure the rest of the nation is. It is hard to realize that anyone could be so mentally sick and so unmindful of his nation’s well being that he would carry out such an act.” Stanislaus County Supervisor Joe Domeq of Denair remarked to the Bee that “I’m shocked and surprised that something like that could happen in this country.” John de Boer, President of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau, commented to the Bee that he felt “sick at heart. The President’s loss will be felt by people all over the world. All of his thoughts and actions were for the welfare of the nation and the world.”

McClatchy Newspapers in Sacramento, publisher of the Bee reported:

“A strange, uncomfortable kind of quiet settled over California’s Capitol when news of the President’s assassination arrived. People walked swiftly but silently down corridors, passing on the news or trying to pick up some. The telephones were jammed immediately. Meetings quietly and quickly were recessed and wherever radios could be found crowds gathered. ‘The President’s shot!’ went rapidly through state government. ‘No! It can’t be!’ A Negro elevator operator commented, ‘They’ll find who did it, and when they do it’ll be that they’re from that Deep South!’ Faces took on a sad, sober and almost sick look. Many of President John F. Kennedy’s friends work in the Capitol.’”

On August 17, 1962, President Kennedy and Governor Pat Brown push plungers to dynamite the opening of construction of San Luis Dam Project

At the Governor’s Office, Governor Pat Brown’s Press Secretary, Jack Burby, rushed to the Governor with a bulletin from their teletype. Governor Brown, a Democrat, exclaimed, “Oh my God!” He remained choked up for a moment, because Kennedy was a personal friend. He canceled all appointments and called a press conference telling reporters that “the death of the President is a sacrifice to the need for peace and the ridding of hatred throughout the world.” Brown was close to tears many times in his address, especially when he told them that he was to be Kennedy’s 1964 presidential campaign chairman in California. California’s Secretary of State Frank M. Jordan, a Republican, said, “The episode was evidence of hate on the part of some people. It is a silent thing, and you really don’t know it’s there until something like this.”
The first *Bee* editorial was published the day of the assassination, in which the editor expressed these words:

“The entire nation has been plunged into deep grief and shame: grief for its slain president, John F. Kennedy, and shame because the nation had bred an assassin so capable of such a cowardly ambush. Kennedy came to the presidency in an hour of rising extremism and in an hour when the preachers of hate were spreading their gospel of fascism across the land, and because this is a free land, they were permitted to speak... Several weeks ago, UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson visited Dallas and was spat upon and hit on the head with a sign... These people listened to the preachers of hate and fear, who want life their own way. Another went farther today. He shot and killed the President of the United States.”

A UPI report published in the *Turlock Journal* was headlined: “Sorrowing Californians Join Mourning for Late President.” It declared there were “shock waves of stunned disbelief and then tearful grief throughout the state. Men and women cried unashamedly in city streets as blaring radios and newspaper vendors spread the word of the President’s death.” There was shock and disbelief everywhere. A woman in Albany, sitting at lunch counter, cried out “Oh, my God. So much tragedy, so much sadness.” A female Australian visitor in San Francisco exclaimed, “Oh. No! How could they do such a thing!” Also in San Francisco, Tom Hansen, who headed the Secret Service in the city and who had guarded four Presidents, could only say, “I feel sick.”

U.S. Senator Sen. Thomas H. Kuchel, California Republican, issued a press statement exclaiming, we are “stunned and sickened. Let all citizens pray for the life of our Republic, to which President Kennedy dedicated and now has given his own.” California Attorney General Stanley Mosk commented that it was “an immeasurable loss to the people of the United States and to the people of the world.” U.S. Congressman John J. McFall, a Democrat who represented San Joaquin and Stanislaus counties remarked:

“All Americans share the loss of a great leader who perhaps more than any other man at this time in history symbolized the Democratic system of the world. It is a time for self-examination and rededication to the ideals of America that were so well reflected in the thoughts and actions of John F. Kennedy. We are fortunate, and the world is fortunate, that another great American is available to lead our people during these troubled times. I have personally pledged my support to President Johnson.”

Universities and colleges throughout the state dismissed classes. Governor Brown allowed state employees the afternoon off. All government services came to a stop in San Francisco. Flags were lowered to half-staff throughout the state. Churches were opened to mourners of all denominations, with concerned people flocking to pray. Monsignor T.J. Bowe, Vicar General of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese in San Francisco, remarked that “the tragic news sends all of our Catholic people to their knees in prayer both for the repose of the soul and for the well-being of our nation.” James A. Pike, Episcopal Bishop of California, “called for a renewal of national purpose so that John Kennedy will not have died in vain.” Rabbi Samford E. Rosen, President of the Board of Rabbis of Northern California, stated that “we declare our conviction that no assassin’s bullet can destroy that for which our leader and nation have stood. Freedom and human equality can never be erased from the hearts and minds of men of good will everywhere.” Jewish synagogues in California offered special prayers in the President’s memory and for the nation.

**Sports Postponed**

College football games throughout the state were either canceled or postponed, including the Big Game between the University of California and Stanford. Kennedy had attended graduate school briefly at Stanford and went to a Big Game. His sister, Eunice Shriver, graduated from Stanford. Head Football Coach John Ralston at Stanford was concerned that his team would be flat when it hosted the University of California Bears the next weekend. Coach Jim Owens of Washington University thought that the first team that could “concentrate on football after this national tragedy, would win.”

In Modesto, the canceling of sporting events was announced. The Eighth Annual Archery Tournament was canceled, and basketball games for the Modesto City Basketball League were rescheduled. A motorcycle scramble at Playland was canceled, and a championship golf match at Sportsmen of Stanislaus was postponed. It was reported in the *Bee* that bowling alleys, golf courses, and ski resorts were to remain open.

Throughout the state, social activity, entertainment, and sporting events came to a halt as residents were absorbed with the assassination news. This was not easy for California, where fun and laughter epitomizes the sunny state. Many of the state’s young people identified with the President. Those in state politics had political and personal ties with him through his campaigning in the West. A grieving Governor Brown boarded an airplane in San Francisco to fly to Washington, D.C. where he would participate in the funeral events.

**Castle Air Base**

Castle Air Force Base in Merced County was placed on alert status. Colonel James V. Reardon, Commander of the 93rd Bomb Wing, released a public message stating that “We at the base, as elsewhere throughout the world, are shocked and in a state of disbelief and anger at this terrible crime against our nation. But most of all, there is a great sense of loss and grief felt by all of us.” At 10 a.m. Saturday, all base personnel gathered at a memorial service to honor President Kennedy, their fallen Commander-in-Chief, and to hear addresses by its chief officers and official statements from America’s top military leaders.

**First Editorial**

*Turlock Journal* editor penned his first editorial, which was entitled “With Sad Hearts We Bow Our Heads to Our Martyred President.” He wrote that like the entire nation, locally everyone is in “deep shock,” and there were feelings of “astonishment and
shame that such a terrible thing could happen” in the U.S. “Instinctively we know that our free government is sound. There is no concern that the American people will rally around a very capable President Johnson. The world sees this and marvels at how legally and orderly presidential succession occurs here. This is the strongest possible testimony for a government of free people.”

Even so, the editor declared, no one can live in total safety. In freedom, there is “an element of mutual trust.” The assassin betrayed this trust being “an individual whose soul was so filled with hate that he could perpetrate a crime of this magnitude.” Many were blaming racial strife and extremists, especially from the extreme right. Others were pointing to communists. The editor wrote that we must wait for the facts before making conclusions. “Willful murder” will always be with us. We must always “take all reasonable precautions to prevent more assassinations.” The writer concluded that with sad hearts we bow our head in respect to our fallen President. “In youthful spirit, he tackled the great problems of our day, unflinchingly and admirably fighting for the right as he envisioned the right. And he paid the supreme sacrifice. We respect and honor him greatly.”

Saturday and Sunday

The day after the assassination, Saturday, November 23rd, activity in the county was quiet, with many watching television news. Business and work continued as usual for the weekend but with less enthusiasm and clouded thoughts. On Sunday, November 24th, most county residents attended church services where activities focused on President Kennedy, the nation, and the future. Television viewers though watched in dismay as the accused assassin, Oswald, was shot by Jack Ruby. It was a surreal moment, with many asking themselves, did I really see that? Yes, live on television: Ruby murdered Oswald as he was being taken to an armored vehicle for transfer to the county jail. This put a new twist on the assassination. There would be no trial of Oswald, and who was Ruby? This opened up a myriad of questions, with the key issue now arising out of the police underground garage: was there a conspiracy?

On Sunday, television viewers watched the slain President’s casket being transported slowly on a caisson, drawn by white horses, down Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C. It was a solemn procession that began at the White House and ended at the Capitol building, where the President would lie in state under the Great Rotunda.

The next day, Monday, November 25th, was President Kennedy’s funeral with a Catholic Mass at St. Matthews Catholic Cathedral and then burial at Arlington National Cemetery. Stanislaus County residents gave their full attention to the events of that mournful day. Governor Brown declared Monday California’s official day of mourning, with county leaders and city mayors proclaiming the same. All federal, state, and local governmental offices were closed, which included all public schools and colleges. Emergency services were manned by skeleton crews, with others being placed on call. Nearly all businesses were closed, with grocery stores opening in the afternoon. Mayor Mario Ieimini of Patterson, placed a paid announcement in the Bee to alert the community that all city offices would be closed on Monday. He asked “that citizens of Patterson join with city officials and employees on this day of national mourning.”

Stanislaus County was represented at the President’s funeral by Carl S. Boyett, 18, a first-year cadet at the Coast Guard Academy. Fellow students selected him to be a member of the Coast Guard Academy’s “Honor Company” to participate in the solemn occasion. Cadet Boyett was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Boyett of Modesto. He graduated from La Loma Junior High School and attended Downey High School, before completing his high school education at McClatchy High School in Sacramento.

On Monday, special memorial services were held in churches throughout the county. Churches opened their doors on Friday and kept them open through Monday. Dr. Harry Wiser of the Greater Modesto Council of Churches remarked that “this is indeed an hour of great grief, because of the loss of our President, John F. Kennedy. We wish to encourage the people of Modesto to pay tribute to him through attendance at memorial services . . . We also ask that everyone request divine guidance for our new President, Lyndon B. Johnson.” A Bee article described the somber Monday: “The flags, which were raised despite this morning’s rain, hung limp and wet at half-mast matching the pall that hung over Modesto, where persons continued individually to come to the churches to pray. Monday had the atmosphere of a Sabbath day, quiet, sober, and reverent. Parking lots stood empty with businesses, stores, and government offices closed.”

Religious Faiths

Bill Endicott of the Bee asked a six-year-old why there was no school today? She answered, “Somebody killed the President. What made somebody do that?” A Modesto mother told Endicott that “the saddest thing I’ve ever seen was his wife and those two little children walking out of the White House. Even if you didn’t like the man how could that not tear your heart out?” Rev. Cornelius J. Cummins conducted a solemn requiem Mass at St. Stanislaus Church in Modesto. He remarked that “a good decent, kindly man has gone to his reward. The nation will miss him as a great President. The world will miss him as a great leader.” At Congregation Beth Scholom Synagogue, Rabbi Judah Fish provided memorial prayers, and also in Modesto, Rev. Halsted M. Gates of the First Presbyterian Church provided prayer and a eulogy. Rev. R.F. Winkleman of

Downey High School students reacting to the assassination on November 22, 1963 in TV room

Modesto Bee photo
Modesto’s First Methodist Church reflected on the tragedy with scripture from the “Book of Revelation.” He also took an offering from the congregation to send to the widow of the slain Dallas Policeman J.D. Tippit. The Turlock Journal carried a statement made by David Paul Smith, President of the Turlock Ministerial Union:

“People of America and of the world are saddened and shamed by the brutal assassination and tragic death of President John F. Kennedy. Violence can have no place in the democratic process, and men of all political and religious persuasions will unite in disavowing senseless and evil acts of this nature. I urge that at religious services to pray for world peace and for the triumph of righteousness and order in the affairs of the nation.”

Chairman of the Stanislaus County Democratic Central Committee told Bee reporter Endicott that “it is difficult, if not impossible, to realize a so vital and dynamic energy has been taken from us.” The committee sent Mrs. Kennedy a telegram of condolence on Friday, and on Saturday wired a message to the White House that read: “President Kennedy gave us a new courage and dedication devoted to the fulfillment of our sacred trust and to the service of the public good and the national interest. And he gave to the world the spirit that moves every man and every nation who shares or hopes for freedom and the future.”

Day of Mourning

The Bee reported that on Monday, the day of Kennedy’s funeral, “virtually all stores and many business firms in Stanislaus, Merced, San Joaquin, and Tuolumne counties will close for periods ranging from several hours to the entire day.” All major shopping centers in Modesto were to be closed. Members of the Stanislaus County Grocers Association voted to stay closed until noon, with independent grocers being closed for the entire day. Ceres Mayor Walter White requested businesses in the community remain closed from 9 a.m. to noon. The Oakdale Chamber of Commerce asked member stores to do the same, with Riverbank following suit. All Stanislaus County banks and savings and loan associations were closed Monday, as well as in surrounding counties.

Before Lee Roddy’s “Adventures of Grizzly Adams” became a popular television series, he worked at the Turlock Journal. In a Journal article he provided a description of Turlock on the National Day of Mourning:

“The brooding loneliness of the Turlock streets hit you first. It hit hard, and you felt it inside like a sick pain. The President is dead. His funeral closed up this town in sadness and respect. Boy Scouts had put out flags along the streets. They hung disconsolately at half-mast, fingered by the barest trace of breeze. A shroud of fog blotted out the sun, adding to the grey feeling. Schools, ordinarily a cheerful center of sound, were closed and silent. Even the leaves, drugged by dripping fog, lay inert on the city streets. An occasional truck and trailer on the highway, loaded with products that wouldn’t wait, splattered the silence. The jarring sound struck the silent faces of the buildings, bounced off the frosted glasses of closed stores, and trickled off again into heavy silence.

“In this day of mourning, the streets were empty. An old man shuffled along, head down, hands in his pockets. A shaggy dog sniffed uncertainly at the strange silence. The signal light went through its brainless changes, but few drivers were there to see. Children were indoors. Television and radios could sometimes be heard, with the mournful tolling of the bells from Washington, D.C. The great and the small laid the slain President to rest. Across this land, from the White House to the smallest home in Turlock, homage was paid the fallen leader. Tomorrow, the sorrow will linger, but the nation will return to duty. The silence of Turlock’s streets and stores will be broken as the nation returns to the work which must be done. But today, there is a hushed sadness in Turlock.”

SSC held its memorial service on Tuesday, November 26th at 11 a.m., now that students were back after four days off. Students, faculty, administration, and staff gathered at Donnelly Hall on the Stanislaus County Fairgrounds, with Faculty Speaker Dr. Lloyd Ahlem serving as facilitator. There were three speakers: SSC President Dr. Alexander Capurso, Assistant History Professor Dr. John P. Rasmussen, and Student Body President Pat Jara. President Capurso talked about the assassination being a “death as sharp as lightning.” He quoted American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: “For when a great man dies, for years beyond our ken, the light he leaves behind him lies upon the paths of men.”

Assistant Professor Rasmussen spoke eloquently about President Kennedy and the nation:

“As a leader and President, John F. Kennedy was more than a man; he was a symbol. He was the symbol of a new generation that was taking up the reins of power, a generation which had come to maturity amid global wars, amid social and economic crises, a dynamic, hard driving generation. To the world, John Kennedy was of course the symbol of our republic. To millions throughout the world he exemplified the youthfulness, dynamics, and essential goodwill of the United States. We have witnessed the grief experienced by people in almost all nations, grief that the life of a great leader and a fine man had been tragically snuffed out. But we must also remind ourselves that the murder of President Kennedy...
was also symbolic – symbolic of our era, symbolic of our predicament as Americans. For our people, for our nation, these are indeed the times that try men’s souls. These years have been the great testing period of our republic, an era in which every weakness in our way of life, every soft spot in our society, has been probed mercilessly and exposed to the glaring light of world opinion.”

Student President Pat Jara told the audience that “John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the epitome of the spirit of youth. It is the spirit, perhaps, which endeared him to those of us who call ourselves students, the spirit which can look at people of all colors and see them as men, the spirit which can pursue peace with a passion and the spirit which is reflected in the attitudes of those who seek the truth.”

Meetings Canceled

The Bee reported there were to be a number of cancellations or rescheduling of meetings by clubs and organizations for the rest of the week. The Metropolitan Dinner Club of Modesto received word that their speaker for Tuesday, U.S. Senator Gale McGee, Democrat of Wyoming, would not attend, because of Kennedy’s death. The Modesto League of Women Voters canceled its meeting for Wednesday afternoon, because their speaker, State Senator Hugh P. Donnelly, Stanislaus Democrat, wanted to respect the death of the President. Wednesday’s evening meeting of the Friendship Social Club at Modesto Moose Hall was canceled, as was an afternoon district meeting of the SPRSI at Odd Fellows Hall. Other organizations canceling meetings were: Modesto Lions Club, Modesto South Side Rotary Club, Toastmasters, Modesto Air Patrol, and Modesto Quarterback Club. Ceres Union High School called off its football banquet that was to feature speaker Vic Rowan, Head Football Coach at San Francisco State College. Al Brenda, Ceres High School Football Coach, rescheduled the event for another week.

High School Memorials

The three Modesto high schools held memorial services on Wednesday, November 27th, before a four-day Thanksgiving Day holiday. At Modesto High School, Principal J. Wesley Berry and English Department Chairman, Jay Cline, addressed two assemblies of students. The school’s concert choir performed, with everyone singing the “Lord’s Prayer.” Downey High School held a combined event, part memorial to President Kennedy and part Thanksgiving Day celebration. Former Modesto Board of Education member, Grace Davis, spoke to a student assembly at Davis High School. Davis student Jeff Wolff read President Kennedy’s Thanksgiving Day proclamation, which the President wrote three weeks earlier. Davis concert choir performed “Cantle of Praise,” “Thanks Be to God,” and “Benedictus.” A special edition of the student newspaper commemorating the President was distributed. Modesto Junior College held a Thanksgiving Day assembly at Emanuel Lutheran Church that was also a memorial tribute to President Kennedy.

Kennedy and California

McClatchy Newspapers correspondent Richard Rodda wrote an article for the Bee entitled “Boyish Looking Campaigner Scored a Hit in Valley Area.” Rodda noted that in 1956, youthful Senator Jack Kennedy stumped through the Central Valley, campaigning for the Democratic Presidential Nominee Adlai Stevenson. He attracted the youth, with hundreds of young people welcoming him at Sacramento Municipal Airport and then escorting him to a political luncheon. He came through the Central Valley again in September 1960, but this time he was campaigning for President. In a special train, he greeted the communities along the way through the Valley. At Sacramento’s Southern Pacific Station, there were 10,000 cheering supporters welcoming him. Even though Kennedy didn’t win the state in the election, he carried the Central Valley. He defeated Nixon by the narrowest of margins in Stanislaus County, 30,302 to Nixon’s 30,213.

After Kennedy was elected President, a number of California political leaders received appointments in his administration. Governor Brown’s Executive Secretary, Fred Dutton, was appointed to the White House staff as one of President Kennedy’s assistants and later became Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations. James K. Carr, who was the Director of the California Department of Industrial Relations, was appointed to serve as Undersecretary of Labor. Kennedy’s Press Secretary Pierre Sallinger served as an official of the Northern California Democratic Party and was seen quite frequently at the Capitol. Plans were underway for Governor Brown once again to lead the California delegation to the 1964 Democratic Convention.

The stock market opened Tuesday, November 26th, with an impressive record of brisk buying. In Modesto, Walton and Company reported buying orders were the largest yet for 1963. Dean Witter in Modesto also reported heavy volume in buying. Both investment companies remarked that they were experiencing the same surge of business occurring across the nation.

More Editorials Appear

Editorials written by Bee and Turlock Journal staff, concerning the assassination and related issues, began to appear with more frequency. Most writers saw indicators of a dramatic
change to be undertaken by the nation from its powerful post-

World War II position. The country’s confidence would be shaken by internal and external problems. The county editorials reveal the thinking in our region in regard to a changing nation and therefore a changing county in terms of the social, political, and economical well-being. The two newspapers were politically different, with the Bee being more liberal, therefore publishing editorials that supported the Democratic Party’s thinking, while the Turlock Journal was more conservative, leaning towards the issues that the Republican Party advocated. There was no extremism in either political position though, with both ideologies being viably important to the concerns addressed.

Turlock Journal’s editorial of November 25th addressed the issue of presidential succession. The editor remarked that with Lyndon Johnson as President, the stability of the nation and its government was not a concern of Americans. President Johnson had the country’s trust. The editorial noted that “citizens of Turlock and vicinity struggle with the emotional impact of laying our newly-martyred President Kennedy in his resting place.” The shock will gradually wear off though, as the nation must turn to the future. The writer remarked that fortunately, just as President Eisenhower had trained Vice President Richard Nixon to be President, President Kennedy had involved Vice President Johnson in presidential affairs. “He sat in and participated in affairs of state, helped assemble and to make effective the policies of the President, and ran important international errands for him.” There was no question that Johnson was prepared to be President. The editor noted that it had been a frustrating congressional year, because of decisions on tough issues of civil rights and taxation. The editorial ended by remarking, “We look for an era of goodwill, moderation, and bipartisanship as the country unites behind its new President.”

One of the editorials in the Bee on November 26th addressed the legacy of President Kennedy. It was entitled “Here Walked a Giant – If Only Briefly.” It discussed the tremendous outpouring of grief throughout the world, the weeping, the sadness, with even Cold War adversary Nikita Khrushchev being stunned by the assassination. The writer commented that it was what Kennedy said that transfixed the world. It was his statements on peace and justice that transfixed the world. The human body guarantees that we can produce spit. Both arms and spit are abundantly supplied. Both are legal, until they are directed in spite at someone. But one must choose. So, Roddy concluded that Americans must come to the realization that each one must commit himself to calm, restraint, and a rededication to loving one another. He asked readers to say on Thanksgiving Day, “Under God, I will be a bigger man than one with a gun.” The editorial concluded, “As Americans, we must try. More, we must succeed. There must be no more spitting, and no more guns. Thank God, we’ve got an opportunity to try.”

Another Turlock Journal editorial appeared on November 27th, with this one analyzing the world’s viewpoint concerning the assassination. From Old World Europe, with its intrigue, the message was conspiracy. Non-communists saw Oswald’s murder by Ruby as a cover-up of a communist instigated plot. But, Great Britain was perplexed by the lack of security, especially in Oswald’s death. For hundreds of years, England has not had a similar assassination, because their citizens couldn’t have such weapons. Communist China simply insulted anything American. The Soviet Union and its satellites saw plots and cover-ups. The Soviet Union shows the world two faces: one friendly and the other manipulative. The communist position was simply to blame right wing fanatics. The editorial ended with the observation that America was caught off guard: “We must look at ourselves differently. We must recognize the danger lurking within the lunatic fringe and dissident elements, and realize that we must meet the destructive challenge with protective and educational measures.”

The Bee carried another thought-provoking editorial, having the heading: “Did JFK Move Too Fast on Civil Rights Issue?” The implication was that Kennedy’s civil rights program stirred up hatred and violence in the South and elsewhere, resulting in a climate
that brought about his death. Oswald was very much aware of the Civil Rights Movement and also the warlike actions aimed at Castro by Americans, especially the Kennedy administration with the Bay of Pigs Invasion and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Oswald’s hero was Fidel Castro, who chastised President Kennedy and American leaders in long haranguing radio and television addresses.

The editorial wanted to know if Kennedy’s civil rights program hastened the hatred and violence to a frenetic pace, with Oswald being caught up in it. The editor quoted a recent Gallup Poll that found 46 percent of Americans felt Kennedy was moving too fast on civil rights; 31 percent thought the speed taken was appropriate; 12 percent wanted faster implementation of civil rights measures; and 11 percent were uncertain. The editor observed that “The miserable truth, of course, is that we are exactly 100 years late in granting the Negroes equal rights as citizens.” He remarked that legally Negroes were entitled to “equal opportunity, equal consideration, equal vote, and equality in the classroom, employment, and in the court of law.” How then was Kennedy moving too fast when he was merely bringing the country up to speed after 100 years of faltering? The President was simply implementing the nation’s constitution, which he was sworn to do, or “the Negro would still be a second class citizen in the year 2263!” The conclusion was Kennedy was doing what was needed, with the violence against civil rights in the South being unpreventable and expected regardless of the speed.

The politically left-oriented Oswald took in the violence civil rights provoked in the South and the violence of U.S. activities towards Castro, along with Fidel’s inflammatory oratory. Combined this with his Marxist belief and his experience and education as a communist in the Soviet Union, the assassin became a walking time bomb. Add delusions of grandeur, his socially fragmented personality, and weapons, the walking time bomb, becomes an explosion. His humanity was gone, his rationale demented, and his trigger finger itchy.

Governor Brown

Governor Brown had just return from the President’s funeral. He addressed an audience at Occidental College that was reported in the Bee on November 27th. He told the assembly that his trip to Washington, D.C. was “the saddest journey of my life.” He asked “students, teachers, political leaders, and citizens to pledge themselves to strengthening democracy.” He set forth three goals: “uphold a bold and responsible government, open doors of opportunity to all citizens, and discourage the growth of festering hate groups.” He proclaimed that the rooting out of hatred, bigotry, extremism, and intolerance should be our priority, because they are the biggest threats to our country. The Governor remarked that the attempts to repeal California’s Fair Housing Act were acts of extremism and division. Such attempts “increase the very tensions we are working so hard to decrease.” He asked Californians to join with him to “examine more closely what we say and do.” He urged leaders and makers of public opinion “to be less partisan and show more charity toward individuals.”

Governor Brown’s remarks were partly a result from a conversation he had with segregationist Alabama Governor George Wallace while riding in a car together in Kennedy’s funeral procession. In their discussion of issues, Governor Brown remarked to the Occidental College assembly that Wallace gave the impression that he wanted to “reexamine some of the things he was doing,” and that he “might be wrong about Negroes.” Wallace received word of Brown’s comments and telegraphed Brown immediately to set the record straight. In regard to Negroes, Wallace said, “I have not altered my position at all.”

Governor Brown replied publicly that he apologizes to Governor Wallace for broaching ethics of confidence, but Brown remembers distinctly their conversation. Brown thought they had agreed that “hatred must be diminished and understanding among men must be increased so the President’s death was not in vain.” Brown added that “if I was wrong in that then I am truly sorry, not only for myself but for our nation.” (Governor Wallace proclaimed in his inaugural address in early 1963: “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever!” In the fall of 1963, he stood in a doorway at University of Alabama blocking entry by two black students. While campaigning for U.S. President in 1972, he was shot in Laurel, MD by a 21 year-old Wisconsin student. The assailant was sentenced to 53 years in prison, while Wallace remained infirmed with paralyzed legs for the rest of his life.)

Governor Brown sent a telegram to President Johnson declaring that “California was with you heart and soul in your struggle to keep the torch of freedom alive. I asked my fellow Californians to lay aside our hatreds and prejudices, our sectional differences, and our own special interests, and secure equal rights for all of our citizens, and a strong national economy.” He asserted that he fully supported President Kennedy’s legislative program.

Assemblyman Veneman

State Assemblyman John G. Veneman, Stanislaus County Republican, asked that all citizens to be more tolerant of public officials, especially those who voiced opposing viewpoints. He made these comments at a gathering of city-county officials at Sundial Lodge in Modesto. The Assemblyman continued, “We should respect the public office and be tolerant of viewpoints. By refusing to utilize the processes of reason, some people have permitted their disagreement with public officials to develop into distrust, abuse, slander, and hate. It is impossible for any legislator to fully represent the views of all his constituents.” He noted that the nation had been witnessing recently extreme views and
misunderstandings. He commented, “The consequence of lack of reasoning, carried to its ultimate extreme [assassination], was now known to all Americans.” Veneman remarked that Americans were more aware of our system of government now, but it cost us enormously. Perhaps, he hoped, that the experience will “improve this country’s moral standards.”

**Control Firearms**

Control of firearms now was a hot issue, especially the mail ordering of weapons. An article in the *Bee* on November 28th noted the California restrictions on firearms: those under 18 could not purchase firearms; aliens, addicts, and ex-convicts could not purchase or carry firearms having barrels 12 inches or long; and no one could possess a machine gun, without a permit. There were no other limitations. Stanislaus County Undersheriff Harry Oliver acknowledged that mail order purchases were difficult to control. He remarked that the mail order system encouraged those who legally couldn’t purchase weapons to buy them by mail. Modesto Police Chief George Bowers asserted that the normal purchasing of guns was so unrestrictive that there was no need for mail orders. A Modesto resident told the *Bee* reporter that he possessed a Chicago sporting goods catalog, from which Oswald ordered his rifle. It cost $12.88, and with a scope, $19.95. It was described in the catalog as fast loading, fast firing, and already tested.

California Attorney General Stanley Mosk requested California sheriffs to attend a conference in San Luis Obispo the first week of December. Stanislaus County Sheriff Dan Kelsay was present, telling the assembly that “I’m opposed to a hasty change in gun laws. It could put us in the position of enforcing an unpopular law and put us behind the gun.” Sheriff Michael Canils of San Joaquin County remarked that “I would oppose any legislation except regulations prohibiting juveniles from buying guns through the mail.” Sheriff Merlin Young of Madera County commented that “hasty legislation would be unwise.” The sheriffs agreed that the California Sheriffs’ Legislative Committee should study gun control and monitor all state legislative proposals in Sacramento.

**More Editorials**

A *Bee* editorial on November 28th called upon Congress to take prompt action in restricting mail ordered weapons. Another *Bee* editorial of the same day supported President Johnson’s pledge to have the assassination fully investigated. The editor remarked that such an interrogation must “be carried out meticulously and fully, because there were too many shadows of doubt both here and abroad.” The assassination suggested that current measures for protecting the Chief Executive were insufficient and incompetent. The editor asked, “What happened to the responsibility of keeping those potentially dangerous under close surveillance that day?” Flabbergasted, the editorial observed that here was a man, Oswald, who defected to Russia, wrote threatening letters, was known as a pro-Castro activist, and was employed in a multistoried building on the motorcade route. The editorial questioned the “sloppy, irresponsible police work, which was a disgrace to a metropolitan city.”

The *Bee* editorial of November 29th remarked that President Johnson’s address before a joint session of Congress was a stirring one and a rallying point for all Americans. The writer commented that President Johnson was a man of great confidence and means, but still the gravity of the moment made him state humbly, “I cannot bear this burden alone.” The editor labeled it as a superb speech in that the nation knew his intentions. He would honor all international commitments; support opportunities of equality; and aid the impoverished. He called upon everyone to end national divisions and “to turn from the fanatics of the far left and far right, from the apostles of bitterness and bigotry and those defiant of law.” Johnson declared that Kennedy programs would live on, “in the spirit he generated.” He stated emphatically, “Let it be known to the nations of the world and let none misunderstand, that I rededicate this government to the unswerving support of the UN, our allies, and to the maintenance of military strength second to none.” The editorial observed that “there were balm and bite in his words and stalwart strength.”

A *Bee* editorial on December 1st praised the wisdom of the Founding Fathers for providing the swift and smooth means for presidential succession, allowing the nation to replace its leader immediately, steadfastly, and without disruption. The editor remarked that in the big picture the smoothness of the transition was because we are “a nation of laws and not of men. No man is bigger than the law, and no man can say that I am the law.”

**Gun Control**

Letters for gun control began piling up in Sacramento on the desks of legislators and the Governor, with Brown wanting firm gun restrictions. Richard Rodda of McClatchy Newspapers in Sacramento wrote in his article that there were just as many advocating controls as there were those wanting none. Chief of Police of Palm Springs, August Kettman, telegraphed Brown that he “strongly endorsed your recommendation for a tighter gun control law in California and throughout the nation.” Brown received letters advocating strict control of firearms in regard to teenagers. There had been teenage suicides and senseless shootings with guns. One letter asked, “Why not prohibit sending firearms through the mail?” Another suggested that “all purchasers of firearms must be fingerprinted.”

Even so, Rodda wrote, there were those who sent correspondence in support of firearms. One wrote, “Our right to keep and bear arms is a precious thing and should be protected. Do not make gun running a profitable business.” Another correspondent remarked that “People, not guns, kill people. Abolish guns, knives, clubs, and stones, and people still will kill people. There is no reason to punish all the shooting population because of the violations of a few troublemakers.” There had been state legislation in 1963 to require a permit from a sheriff or chief of police for someone to purchase “any firearm capable of concealment.” It was supported by Governor Brown but died in committee, because of vigorous opposition from the National Riflemen’s Association (NRA) and sportsmen’s groups. Brown called the gun lobby the most powerful advocacy group in the Capitol.

The “All Around the Town” column by Uncle Bob in the *Turlock Journal* of December 2nd advocated the renaming of Turlock Youth Center on East Avenue to John F. Kennedy Memorial Youth Center. Uncle Bob’s reasoning was President Kennedy emphasized
healthy bodies and healthy minds as the key to developing better citizens. The columnist remarked that President Kennedy captured the imagination of America’s youth like no other President since Theodore Roosevelt.

**Kennedy on Train through Valley**

The column “Petals and Pistils” by Kay Bee, appearing in the Bee on December 3rd, told of the author seeing John Kennedy onboard his 1960 campaign train traveling from Stockton to Modesto. She remarked that he shook our hands and vigorously, declaring how happy he was to meet us. He signed copies of Profiles of Courage that travelers brought to him. Kay Bee commented that all who were aboard the train were captivated by his friendliness and his comments. After his assassination, many of those who had been on that 1960 campaign train gathered and searched for a tangible tribute to the slain President. They discussed the fact that President Kennedy wanted to end poverty, ignorance, prejudice, and exploitation. Then someone read stanzas from Carl Sandberg’s poem about a free man. “The free man is willing to pay and struggle and die for the freedom for himself and others; some day when the United States of Earth gets going and runs smooth and pretty there will be more of him than we have now.” Kay Bee remarked that President Kennedy would have agreed that the basic sign of a free man was one who had “the right to choose his rulers, forthrightly, and without fear.”

Kay Bee wrote that in the Deep South there were many who were afraid to vote, and because of this, volunteers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were there to help these terrified but loyal citizens. SNCC members had been jailed, shot at, had death threats, and were harassed by local police. Various labor unions, some representing retail clerks and teachers, were supporting SNCC activities. Kay Bee urged those who wanted to memorialize the fallen President to send contributions to SNCC in Fresno. (A few years later, SNCC was labeled a radical organization, having communist ties. It was an active left wing organization, had controversial officers, and was kept under surveillance by law enforcement during the 1960s and 70s.)

**American Legion Memorial**

On the evening of December 3rd, Turlock’s American Legion Post, Rex Ish Post 88, honored the late President with over 100 in attendance. There were several speakers in the two-hour memorial service. Lin Griffith, Deputy District Attorney, provided a history of Kennedy’s family, with the first member arriving in the U.S. in 1847, having escaped the potato famine in Ireland. Rev. Father Manuel V. Alvernaz of Turlock’s Sacred Heart Catholic Church remarked that Kennedy was both an American and a Catholic, with “both allegiances being tested and Kennedy passed all tests.” Another speaker was Dr. David Stenzel, Associate History Professor at Stanislaus State College, commenting that Kennedy “deserves the label of greatness, because of the new mood he bestowed on our country.” His civil rights program had been a major contribution to the nation, “stopping the uncertainty, doubt, and drifting.”

**Ruby**

A Bee editorial of December 5th criticized Ruby, labeling his murderous action as “a temporary breakdown in the rule of law.” The writer remarked that Ruby acted as prosecutor and judge, a wrong selfish attitude, violating U.S. law. The editorial declared that it was everyone’s constitutional right to have a fair trail. This fact placed the U.S. in the category of being “civilized.” Also, the editor noted that everyone was guaranteed equal protection under law, with the Dallas Police failing miserably to do this. President Kennedy devoted his life to strengthening those American tenets that Ruby violated with one bullet. The editorial remarked that those who applauded Ruby’s impulsive act were in fact destroying American civil rights. Even though Oswald had committed the most heinous crime for a civilized nation, once in custody, law enforcement was responsible for his fullest protection.

**LBJ and Government**

During the summer of 1963, Turlock High School civics teacher, Robert Latour, wrote to Vice President Johnson asking him for “his opinion of the essence of the legislative process” and his picture. Latour knew that Johnson was a master of the legislative process, and thought that if Johnson replied, he would have priceless information to share with his students. Johnson replied quickly on July 5th providing an answer and his picture. The Vice President wrote that answering the “essence” question was “rather a tall order,” because “very few legislative situations are exactly alike.” He remarked that multiple pages would be needed to explain the processes, but in general:

“A good deal of the legislative process consists of listening to the other fellow. If we listen long enough and hard enough and really try to understand, we usually find that differences are not quite so irreconcilable, as they appeared upon their first presentation. The most important single lesson a legislator must learn is not to get his exercise by leaping at conclusions. If a proposal truly has merit there is almost always a way of finding common ground upon which enough people can stand to put the measure through a legislative body.”

**Warren Commission**

Early in December, President Johnson appointed the President’s Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, that would be known as the “Warren Commission.” He appointed seven members, who were of the highest caliber as public officials and together formed a balanced viewpoint. Chief Justice of
the U.S. Supreme Court Earl Warren, a former California Governor, was appointed chairman. Gladstone Williams, correspondent for McClatchy Newspapers in Washington, D.C., commented that the quality of the Commission’s membership ensured the investigation would be thorough and professionally administered. This would guarantee that Americans would have the fullest confidence in the investigation “to put at rest any unfounded charges and myths that may grow out of the assassination.”

Williams remarked that the Warren Commission’s bipartisan appointees were to represent “national unity,” which was necessary because of the nature of the crime. By appointing the Commission, Johnson was preventing partisan investigations of the assassination, which could lead to political squabbles and continued disunity. Besides conducting its own independent investigation, the Commission received investigative reports from the FBI and the Dallas Police Department.

Kennedy’s Light

The one-month mourning period for the death of President Kennedy ended on December 23rd. President Johnson addressed some 25,000 at Lincoln Memorial, where thousands held lighted candles. The event was seen on television and heard on radio. At the National Guard Armory in Modesto, public memorial services were held to mark the end of the mourning period. An address was given by Major George W. Gardner, and all county flags were returned to full-staff, with black crepe being removed from public buildings. An editorial appeared in the Bee eulogizing the fallen President once more. The writer spoke to his dedication, freshness, youth, ideas, and strength that “the people instinctively sensed.” Kennedy showed “a profile of courage” that brought him friends and enemies. The editorial stated, “He placed his own prestige on the line for civil rights. For one who served so briefly he began so much. His monument was his abiding faithful service in war and in peace.”

Ruby

On March 17, 1964, a Dallas jury ruled that Ruby was guilty of first degree murder in his shooting of Oswald. His plea of temporary insanity was rejected. A Bee editorial declared this verdict put an end to the chaos brought about by the assassination and the murder of the assassin. Law was restored, and legal authority reestablished in Dallas. (In 1966, the jury’s verdict was overturned, because the trial judge had allowed illegal testimony. A new trial was set, but in 1967, Ruby died of cancer, before the new trial began. He claimed someone injected him with cancer cells while incarcerated.)

Ted Kennedy

As civil rights legislation was limping through the Senate in early 1964, there was a very young freshman Senator who voiced his support on April 13th. Ted Kennedy was elected in 1962 to replace his brother Jack as U.S. Senator from Massachusetts at the age of 30. His only experience in American politics was campaigning for his brother, but being a Kennedy was enough to step into his brother’s shoes. It was common practice for junior senators to remain quiet to learn and show respect to their mentors. Ted Kennedy waited for weeks, while the civil rights legislation was debated to finally address the Senate for the first time. This was his brother Jack’s legislation and crusade, and now with him gone over four months, it was time for Ted to speak up and show support. According to a Bee editorial entitled “Ted Kennedy Scores Hit in First Speech,” his address was “lean, sparse, moving, filled with the stuff of reason.” Ted told the august chamber of senators that:

“The bill abounds with reasonableness, with conciliation, with voluntary procedures, with a moderate approach toward its goals. With provisions as mild as these, it can truly be said that even in passing this bill we are still relying primarily on the decency and the conscience of the American people to secure these rights for Negro citizens . . . His (President Kennedy) heart and soul are in this bill. If his life and death had a meaning, it was that we should not hate but love one another; we should use our powers not to create conditions of oppression that lead to violence, but conditions of freedom that lead to peace.”

The editorial exclaimed that Ted had handled his statement delicately and spoke to Americans truths of reasonableness, conciliation, moderation, and rights of U.S. citizens. It was eloquent, with Senator Paul Douglas of Illinois calling it “magnificent and truly noble.” Senator Wayne Morse of Oregon declared that he was moved “deeply, emotionally, and intellectually.” Senator Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota termed it “inspiring” and would “receive considerable attention.”

Lincoln and Kennedy

There were some uncanny similarities with Abraham Lincoln and John Kennedy, which received considerable ink in newspapers throughout the U.S. The Bee printed these “Striking Similarities” in its July 8, 1964 issue:

“Both Presidents were greatly concerned with the issue of civil rights; Lincoln was elected in 1860 and Kennedy in 1960; both were slain on a Friday in the presence of their wives; their successors both named Johnson, were Southerners, Democrats, and previously served in the U.S. Senate; Andrew Johnson was born in 1808 and Lyndon Johnson in 1908; assassin John Wilkes Booth was born in 1839 and Lee Harvey Oswald in 1939; Booth and Oswald were Southerners favoring unpopular issues; Booth and Oswald were shot before a trial could be arranged; both Presidents’ wives lost children to death while residing in the White House; President

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Lincoln’s secretary, whose name was Kennedy, advised him not to go to the theater, and President Kennedy’s secretary, whose name was Lincoln, advised him not to go to Dallas.”

**First Anniversary**

The first anniversary of President Kennedy’s assassination, November 22, 1964, was somber day across the nation, with memorials and tributes given to the slain President. A *Bee* editorial spoke to the moment. It wondered how would JFK be seen in history. The writer remarked that his life and presidency was so brief, and those who lived during his political years will see his “youth, vigor, imagination, and grace.”

Three years after Lincoln’s death, it was predicted by some that he would “not be remembered long now.” Kennedy’s place in history was just as uncertain. The writer observed that on the first anniversary of Kennedy’s assassination “the nation seemed to be thinking back to what he was saying and what he was trying to do more than merely nostalgically recalling the attractive man as he lived.”

His “real moment,” the editorial remarked, was “what he asked of the people, not in what he proposed to give them.” He “appealed to reason, home and abroad, which ran like a thread through all of his speeches.” He claimed that “if civilization was to survive, the world must be made safe not for one or another way of life but for diversity.” The editor concluded that “he lived too briefly to finish the work but history will not forget that he began it. No President in modern times, with the possible exception of Franklin Roosevelt, asked more of the people or set them about higher tasks. He was a vision bright.”

Written by Robert LeRoy Santos

**Profiles in Courage Award**

This is an annual award presented by the John F. Kennedy Foundation to those who have exhibited “Profiles in Courage” as exhibited in the biographies found in President Kennedy’s book by the same name. The recipients must have acted in accord with their conscience and risked their lives or careers by pursuing visions that are opposed to popular thinking or pressures of the day. Their vision and actions must be directed to the better welfare of their locale, state or nation. The award ceremony had been held since 1990 at the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library in Harvard University, near the birthday (May 29th) of President Kennedy. The award winners are selected by a bipartisan committee appointed by the Foundation and may contain Kennedy family members. Past awards have been presented by Caroline Kennedy and Ted Kennedy. The award is a sterling silver lantern manufactured by Tiffany’s and designed by Edwin Schlossberg. The lantern is a replica to the lanterns on the *USS Constitution*, the U.S. Navy’s only remaining sail-powered ship that is anchored in the nearby harbor. These are the recipients:

- 1990 – Carl Elliott, Sr.
- 1991 – Charles Weltner
- 1993 – James Florio
- 1994 – Henry Gonzalez
- 1995 – Michael Synar
- 1996 – Corkin Cherubini
- 1997 – Judge Charles Price
- 1998 – Nickolas C. Murnion
- 1999 – Russell Feingold and John McCain
- 2000 – Hilda Solis
- 2001 – John Lewis and Gerald Ford
- 2002 – Kofi Annan and Dean Koldenhoven
- 2003 – Dan Ponder, Jr., David Beasley, and Roy Barnes
- 2004 – Sima Samar, Cindy Watson, and Paul Muegge
- 2005 – Joseph Darby, Shirley Franklin, Bill Ratliff, and Victor Yushchenko
- 2006 – Alberto J. Mora and John Murtha
- 2007 – Bill White and Doris Voitier
- 2008 – Brooksley Born
- 2009 – Leymah Gbowee
- 2010 – Karen Bass, Dave Cogdill, Darrell Steinberg, and Michael Villines
- 2011 – Elizabeth Redenbaugh, Wael Ghonim, and the People of Egypt
- 2012 – Marsha K. Ternus, David L. Baker, and Michael J. Streit
- 2013 – Gabrielle Giffords

Written by Robert LeRoy Santos

**Commemorative stamp issued March 1964**
REACTION TO THE ASSASSINATION
LETTERS FROM THE PEOPLE - MODESTO BEE
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR - TURLOCK JOURNAL

This article contains letters written by Stanislaus County residents to the editors of the Modesto Bee and Turlock Journal, commenting on President Kennedy’s assassination and associated issues and events. These correspondences were published in the Modesto Bee under “Letters from the People” and in the Turlock Journal as “Letters to the Editor.” The letters contain the thoughts, observations, and opinions of local residents concerning the tragic events of late November 1963. Even though these messages were individualized, they reflect the general attitude of the vast majority of county residents. They were carefully crafted by a variety of personalities, with varying education and writing skills. Of importance though is they signify the nature of the American people, who are thoughtful, reasonable, and tolerant. Americans are taught to be civilized, and that character resonates in the expressions and thought in the following letters.

Because of space, some of the letters were edited for length, but their substance remains in the paragraphs selected and represent the writer’s intent. Also because of space, only one month of letters are possible to present, which covers from November 24 through December 27, 1963; however, these early messages are quite important, because they are the first responses to the nation’s tragic loss 50 years ago in Dallas.

**Modesto Bee, November 24, 1963**

“**We Are Not Worthy**” by Deep Sorrow, Hughson

As I turned on my television set in my usual manner at 11 a.m. and heard the news bulletin of the assassination of our truly great President, my thoughts went immediately to Jesus. That God had sent John Kennedy to lead us had at that moment registered in my mind and that stupidity [Oswald] had taken him from us. I truly feel sorry for myself as an American citizen to live in such a country. Such a fine man, father and leader, we were not truly worthy of. May God help us.

**Modesto Bee, November 26, 1963**

[No Title] by Salah Alami, Modesto

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate and Merciful. Not only the American people have suffered a great loss in the death of President John F. Kennedy, but people the world over have. My brother and I came from another country, Jordan. The news came as a shock, we could not believe it, and wished it were not true. We decided to join and console the American people with their grief and to mourn in our own way. We are Arab Moslems and decided today to quit all kind of entertainment and follow the news. We have some [phonograph] records of our Holy Book the Ku’ran, and though we do not have a mosque of our own around, we decided to pray and give a small service in our own place and recited verses from the Ku’ran for the soul of the late President Kennedy.

We prayed in our own way to the man who sacrificed his soul for the cause of justice and peace. Great men do not die when they recorded clean chapters in history, and although President Kennedy has left this face of the earth, his deeds and great achievements will live in books of history for many generations to come. We would like to express our deepest sorrow and grief and to console the American people in general, and to the Kennedys in particular.

**Modesto Bee, November 26, 1963**

“**Heavy Hearts**” by Mosy Hamaway, Modesto

Word came that our President was assassinated in Dallas. It is unbelievable that anything so horrible could happen in our country! There is no one, I’m sure, be he Republican or Democrat, who doesn’t feel a great sadness for the loss of a great, young man, who has been doing his best to lead us toward peace. Our deepest sympathy goes to a gallant and gracious young woman and her two children. I am, personally, humiliated, and ashamed that such a tragedy should happen in my home town and state [Dallas, Texas]! Our prayers should be with President Johnson.

**Modesto Bee, November 26, 1963**

[No Title] by R.W.S., Modesto

We of these United States of America should bow our heads in shame over the assassination of the President of the United States. He was doing his best to keep us in peace. It is not only tragic, but it was done by one of our own people. How foolish, stupid or crazy can we get? It seems to me that we have harbored too many foreigners of doubtful character in this country for too long. . . . The nation has sustained a terrible loss and it is too bad some animal had to be among us. Just how low can a person get? It is time that we screen more of our doubtful citizens. This is an unspeakable crime to all people of this country and to the free world. They say Texas does everything in a big way. All I have to say is Dallas will be a long time in living down this dark day. This is a great loss to our country and the world will long mourn Kennedy’s passing. President Kennedy died serving his country.

**Modesto Bee, November 26, 1963**

[No Title] by Mrs. Clara B. Patterson, Waterford

In memory of our beloved president, John F. Kennedy, I wish to pay tribute: to a great and honest man; a strong, yet gentle, fearless, man; a man capable of holding the reins steady while guiding our great country through the storm clouds of war, great unrest, and stupidity, on to the light of freedom, where we can worship the Almighty God, in the sunshine of peace and understanding; a smiling man who never seemed to meet a stranger; a Godly man who didn’t judge a human by the color of his skin; a man of whom I’m proud I chose our leader; a man in whom I placed full confidence, as the Commander-in-Chief of our United States of America; and a man whose wisdom I still trust and whose memory I will honor by giving my pledge to stand by now and in later years.
with Lyndon B. Johnson.

**Modesto Bee, November 27, 1963**
“**How?**” by Hazel Koen, Modesto

How can one bullet do so much to so many? [No more was written]

**Modesto Bee, November 27, 1963**
“**Killed by Hate**” by J.B., Modesto

“Ask not what our country can do for us, but what we can do for our country.” The man who spoke these words is dead, but these words will live in my mind forever. As the newspapers, radios, and television stations screamed the news, the horrible ghastly news of our President’s death, people about me were stunned and shocked at first, then they turned to each other gasping. “I wonder who could have done such a horrible thing?”

I just stood there quietly. There was not a question in my mind who had done this horrible thing. We had done it! Yes, that is right. The United States did this, and I am ashamed, angry, and sorry. Perhaps the reader may think, “How could I possibly have had anything to do with the President’s death? I wasn’t even near him.” . . . Whatever one of the people in our country does, it is reflected on each and every one of us. Many of us felt ashamed and sorry, and this is the reason why.

A feeling of hate is slowly building up in me toward this person who killed our president. I must let it escape, for it was hate itself that killed our President, not just an ordinary hate, but a deep, black hate. If we let this hate continue, we will destroy ourselves and our country. I should feel pity for this person, for he must be extremely twisted to have carried out such an unforgiving act, but I feel only a hatred for him, a deep sickeningly nauseating hatred. This hatred is not good. Perhaps in time the feeling will cease to be.

The death of the president is truly a great loss. He had a remarkable understanding of men. The Negroes at last were starting to get a chance at real life, a life worth living. The President was responsible for this. He stood strong and firm in his beliefs that all men, no matter what religion or nationality, should be free under God. Will this continue? He also was beginning to create a better understanding between the nations of the world and the United States. Will this also continue? He stood firm for the right and work to fulfill these right ideals so ably expressed by President Kennedy in his public addresses.

**Modesto Bee, November 29, 1963**
“**We Must Unite**” by In Memory of JFK, Modesto

John F. Kennedy was one of our greatest Presidents. He led us during three short years in which there were many crises. His strength and courage brought us through those times. By his death our nation has gained a national martyr for Democracy and the American way of life. His hand was outstretched to all men. He seemed to carry the friendship of God with him. It is hard for all Americans to grasp that our youngest President has gone to the arms of God. We all know that our late President would want us to rally around our new President and to give him all the strength that we are able to give.

I am sure many persons are praying for Mrs. Kennedy. The years ahead will be hard for her and the Kennedy family. Mrs. Kennedy will understand in future years that her husband has given our people more than any one man could. She shall learn her husband still lives in the hearts and minds of all Americans and that he will live with us until we ourselves die.

I, like many Americans, could not believe the news that came Friday. Although this was not a personal loss, the tears came, for he was our leader. The wound is deep in all the hearts of all Americans and President Kennedy shall live with us forever. His works linger on. His voice is clear and sharp. He speaks through our hearts as we unite together in memory of him.

President Kennedy took his courage and showed he was a man. He fought for civil rights and equal opportunities. He is dead now and so we must unite and stand up to show our courage. We must go on with the work he so deeply believed in and died for. I firmly believe our nation shall finish his great works for we are a united
nation, and we unite now under a new President, Lyndon B. Johnson.

Modesto Bee, November 29, 1963
“Prayer for Peace” by Neva Staggs, Patterson
It is with heavy heart and hand that I write this to my fellow Americans: Our country, our Flag and our President are very meaningful to us and now one of them has been taken from us. We are saddened and shamed that such a horrible act could have been committed in our wonderful country. Whatever our race, creed or political aspirations may be, the important fact to remember always is that we are Americans. We have lost a beloved friend and leader, and we shall never be the same without him. My sincere hope and prayer is that in his death there will be a world united in peace, which he strived for so valiantly and which was not possible in his life. What a lasting tribute this would be to marvelous America!

Modesto Bee, December 1, 1963
“Salute to Mrs. JFK” by Mrs. Faye Villines, Modesto
On November 22nd the United States lost a great leader. The nation grieved. And although she grieved, Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy walked with pride and dignity, proud to have been the wife of the President of the United States, the mother of his children. Through this time of tragic sorrow, she walked alone with courage and dignity. So I salute Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, a truly great woman.

Modesto Bee, December 1, 1963
“A German Boy Reacts to President’s Assassination” by Rainer Duhm
[Rainer Duhm, German teenager, had been an International Christian Youth Exchange high school student for a year, living with Mr. and Mrs. Julius Wright of Oakdale. Duhm was in Friedrichsfien, West Germany when he heard the announcement of Kennedy’s assassination. He immediately wrote a letter to the Wrights.] “[I am in] a mood of inmost sympathy, horror and maybe astonishment and incapacity of understanding. Believe me, it’s the most horrible thing I have heard in a long time. Right now as I write this it’s fresh in my mind. I feel very depressed, and even more. It was a long, long time that I have been as near to weeping as I am right now. This may be strange for you, as a boy, in this age, and not an American. But I was touched so deeply. I have the feeling as if one of my nearest friends or relatives had died. This showed me very suddenly and deeply how much I am part of your country and your country is part of me. I never realized that before so much.” [Duhm was expected to return to the U.S. for college the following year.]

Modesto Bee, December 1, 1963
“Says Blame Misdirected” by L.J., Modesto
It is becoming a little wearisome taking the upbraiding of commentators, news writers, and top government officials for the Oswalds, Rubys, and Dallas Police Departments among us. We the people are to blame? The finger of blame instead should be turned right back on those who seek to blame us. They, not we, are the voices and power in America. They are in a position to do something about the ferment stirring and growing in twisted minds.

School prayers are downgraded and rooted out. The little Oswalds and Godless parents can be seen in any school gloating over this victory as they sneer at our Flag. Loyalty oaths are dispensed with. Nobody’s freedom is being violated in asking that he state publicly he is for a government supporting and dedicated to protecting that very freedom. Unions are allowed to disperse to the laboring class dangerous literature aimed at the uninformed mind. Hate slogans, anti-democratic concepts, and open communist line propaganda are fed to potential Oswalds.

Is there an answer? Yes. In a country dedicated to freedom and Democracy we cannot allow the festering sores of communist groups among us. It is a fallacy to claim freedom for those who would destroy it. This is not protecting our basic rights but denying them to allow individuals or groups to preach, issue such literature or organize for anti-freedom or democratic reasons. To such are attracted the Oswalds.

We must be intolerant of the oddball next to us with his un-American mouthing. We must speak out and demand action of lawmakers who challenge our freedom with insidious changes or interpretations of our constitution and laws. To put it bluntly, we must start to speak up to our neighbors, friends, churches, Parent-Teacher Associations, lawmakers, and those with the wisdom to hear.

Instead of allowing the busy little Oswalds to change us, we must get busy too. Surely, there are citizens enslaved in Russia who gladly would support an exchange program for the dissatisfied among us. Their slavery for our fanatics who would kill, not die, for their political beliefs. There is a non-hate slogan and thought for our accusers and the dissatisfied to think over: “Don’t change us. Change instead your locale!”

Modesto Bee, December 1, 1963
“Soul Searching Due” by Mrs. Oscar Lightner, Modesto
It is now nine days since news of the terrible tragedy which stopped the world. In just these past few days I have heard so-called adult American citizens make statements such as these: “He should have been shot long ago,” “They finally got the Negro lover,” “Now maybe we’ll get a decent President,” and “No use going home, nothing on television but that guy.”

And we say we are a Christian and civilized nation. This you hear from parents, and you wonder how there can be so much hate. This great and courageous young President lost his life fighting for the things he believed in, such as giving people the right to sound off on no matter what. Whether or not he was our preference as a voter, or as a man, there too are things he believed was our right as a free people, to agree or disagree.

With so much hate inside, we forget he was a human being. A very warm and friendly one, I might add. What a crime that such a brilliant young statesman should be so brutally murdered, and that we should lose the dignity that he gave to politics and the White House. On Thanksgiving Day some of us attended the church of our choice to seek comfort and guidance for this horrible deed we have all been guilty of. Later in the day we all gathered with our
loved ones around the table and gave our thanks to God for our many blessings.

What about the courageous young widow and her two children? The little boy who spent his third birthday at his daddy’s funeral and saluting like a little man to the passing casket, which held what just a few days before was his handsome laughing daddy? What about the little girl who was 6 Wednesday being every bit the brave, gracious woman her mommy is?

When they gathered with their loved ones, whom JFK loved so dearly, just how could they thank God for their blessings so the youngsters would understand? I’m sure in her deep and abiding faith, Mrs. Kennedy found a way. We have lost one of the greatest and finest leaders of our time. We will miss his friendly, ready smile, the sense of honor, his ready wit, most of all, his dedicated leadership in there trying times. I pray that we all do some soul searching and reevaluating that this truly great man has not died in vain.

*Modesto Bee, December 1, 1963*

“No Room for Pity” by N.S., Modesto

My heart is deeply saddened along with other fellow citizens at seeing our beloved President John F. Kennedy laid in his final resting place. It was a great loss, to each and every one of us, to our country and all nations, as he was dearly loved by all. I didn’t think the pain could be any greater in my heart than it was as I watched the funeral on television, but I found I was wrong as the news commentator followed the President’s last rites with films of two other funeral services, Lee Oswald’s and the poor slain Police Officer J.D. Tippit in Dallas.

My sympathy is greatly extended to the loved ones of these men who met violent death, as I know their sorrow is deep and painful. While viewing these films I suddenly felt a new deep pain, a pain for Oswald’s saddened mother, wife and children who walked alone in their hours of sorrow. In this vast land of ours, with so many wonderful people, how can four innocent people be so alone? They not only suffered the loss of a son, father, and husband, whom I’m sure they loved dearly, they suffered pain and shame of the crime he had committed, a twice fold sorrow on their heavy laden shoulders along with the knowledge “no one” shared their sorrow with them. No one cared. Only these four lonely people.

People of America, do we hold so much hatred in our hearts toward this man and his deeds that it leaves no room for pity for his innocent family? Has anyone asked his wife what help they may need? Has a fund been started for the needs they must have? Don’t we think those little children get hungry, as other little children can, who suddenly have had their father taken from them and their source of income stopped. What does their future hold for them? Must they suffer for something they had nothing to do with? Isn’t this the type of thoughtless hatred, and lack of love for our fellow man, the very thing our beloved President had dedicated himself to rid us of?

*Turlock Journal, December 2, 1963*

“No Room for Pity” by L.T. Smith

The assassination of President Kennedy brings to our attention with tremendous impact that this world is no safe place for a man to state his convictions, and that envy, hatred, jealousy, prejudice, and bigotry still control the minds of many people. In part, at least, this is due to people or men in high position not only in the U.S. but most every country in the world. Men in power in politics, in industry, in labor unions, in various organizations and even in church and religious groups are and have been guilty of fanning the flames of hatred and prejudice to where the ignorant and the thoughtless are aroused to an insane fever pitch where they are aroused to violence and murder.

It was claimed by many that the assassination of President McKinley was due to the cartoons in various newspapers throughout the country depicting him as the head of a political machine which exploited and robbed the common people. The misguided soul who shot him really thought he was doing a service to the people. Any man or organization that preaches hatred and violence is a menace to our nation. The person who deliberately endeavors to inflame his fellows against each other, either by false witness or lies, is a menace to the country. There are two classes of assassins. One is a character and reputation assassin, the other endeavors to take the life of those who oppose or disagree with him.

Not any of us are free from hatred and prejudice against others at various times. At times we are jealous of our own home. There is jealousy in the political parties, in lodges, in unions, between labor and capital, between different races and religions and even members of churches are jealous of one another. Unless this ill feeling is overcome, it leads to trouble.

If we ever expect to do away with trouble in this world, we must begin with ourselves. Ask ourselves “Do I have hatred in my heart for any people? For those of a different race or religion?” After all, a communist is a human being. We can hate communism, but we must not hate the individual, regardless of his belief. If we drive hatred out of our own hearts then we can inflame others to do the same. As long as there is jealousy and hate in men’s hearts, there will be assassinations and killings. It takes moral and physical courage to stand for what we believe. I believe that President Kennedy showed he had considerable of both. Any man who takes a stand is going to have enemies. The great men of history were such men. They took a stand, even if it meant death.

*Modesto Bee, December 3, 1963*

“Tribute by Teenager” by A Proud American, Modesto

I am only 17 years-old, but I would like to pay my last tribute to our late President John F. Kennedy. I feel he was a great man, one of the best Presidents of our United States. Our nation was in secure hands. I agree with Prime Minister Harold Macmillan of Great Britain, who said, “The whole world, even Russia trusted this man to hold the thunderbolt of nuclear power in his hands.” He promoted international peace which is so important in the world today. President Kennedy also realized every man is created equally by
God. He knew there would be opposition to his fight for the Negroes. But did this stop him? No! He understood it was not for man to decide who would get which rights. Men, regardless of their color, are endowed with certain rights which no one can take away but God.

His smiling face glowed everywhere, and it made me proud to say this was America’s President, a friend to all. This President may be dead, but his ideas will live on. They cannot be killed or stamped out as easily as a life can be taken from the earth. My prayers are now with President Lyndon B. Johnson. May he carry out some of our last President’s fine, human, and Christian ideas.

Modesto Bee, December 3, 1963
“Mexico Bares Heart” by Ruth Lowenstein of Modesto, writing from Oaxaca, Mexico
I flew into southern Mexico to hear the shocking news of violence that brought to a close the life of our President. The newspaper presses in Mexico City in their attempt to supply all of Mexico with the printed story were running far beyond schedule and the planes which bring in passengers, mail, and news were coming into the remote areas hours late. In this Zapotecan city little groups of Indians had pooled their centavos to buy the local papers which ran a special edition announcing the tragedy. Everywhere I was stopped and offered the sympathy of these people who spoke of the death of a man who was their friend and of the sorrow of the senora [Mrs. Kennedy] who had just lost her baby and now must know this tragedy.

The Indians from the outlying villages, poor little places where poverty is in such evidence, were bringing flowers and walking long, long distances to the little French Colonial Plaza in the heart of Oaxaca where we usually hear a concert each evening, but the night and for three days, there was none. All the places of amusement elected to close and Mexico was in mourning for three days. Each morning and evening at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. taps and reveille were trumpeted by a small group of men before the flowers and wreaths brought in by Indians, local trade unions, and organizations and before the echoes had subsided they moved as silently away as they had come.

All over Mexico that night a special mass was held in whichever was the most important church in the village or city, and we Americans regardless of political or religious views joined. It is difficult to describe these moments when a whole nation offers its heart and sympathy to you, an American, and to the leader of your country, and I was touched and humbled in the face of such sincere and deep felt sympathy, as were all from the north.

Modesto Bee, December 4, 1963
“History Repeats” by An American, Modesto
History repeats itself, and some feeble minded group feels it can ruin a nation. What, pray tell me, did they accomplish? We Americans are made of pretty good stuff and therefore you can’t keep a good nation down. A good and kind man was here and led his people in the very best way he knew how. Now we must replace our leader, which already has been done, and continue where he left off. Do they really feel we ever shall fall? No sir, Americans, not on their lives, for we are the land of the free and the home of the brave and by thunder and God’s grace we shall always remain that way.

Modesto Bee, December 4, 1963
“No Title” by Mrs. G. F. Peterson, Turlock
I note plans are being made to dedicate memorials to the late President. This is very admirable, but I am sure the best memorial would be for people to try to weed hatred and intolerance out of their hearts for those with whom they disagree in politics or religion or who are of another race or nationality and to refuse to listen to any such expression of hatred wherever expressed or to join “hate” groups.

Not long before the President was murdered, an acquaintance of ours visited the South. He says everywhere he went he heard hate talk against the President. So violent were these expressions that he feared to say a word in defense of the President or anything the President stood for. Before the election of Kennedy, I heard so many expressions of hatred and intolerance right in and around this town that I was often terribly shocked and upset. They came from religious people frequently and from educated, cultured people – who should know better – and even from the pulpit. Hatred is far more terrible force for evil than most people realize.
tragic deficiencies in our culture is that we are not taught how to
give loving acceptance. I feel everything that has been told about
Oswald’s past indicates he was a fellow who never felt accepted.
Even his mother felt persecuted and passed this feeling on to him.
He felt he was among the rejected and had to prove this worth.
Even when he turned to communism he didn’t find the recognition
he needed.

Recently, he went to Mexico asking for a visa to return to Russia
and was denied. He claimed he was a chairman of the Fair Play for
Cuba Committee, but this group also had rejected him. I feel he felt
he was ready to do almost anything to get recognition or at least
attention. He couldn’t find his place in the sun. Because this culture
had no place for him, because he could find no role in the drama of
life that gave him satisfaction he felt he must strike back. We had
destroyed his image of worth; he had to destroy ours.

Even as I saw him on television, it looked as if he were enjoying the
confusion he had caused and the attention he was getting. Now
here comes this other fellow [Ruby]. He couldn’t stand by and see
Oswald get all this attention so he had to destroy him. Now he is
the center of attention. To a distorted sense of values it is likely
that, cost what it may, it is worth it. It is tragic that our competitive
system forces us to even compete for our place in the sun. All of us
seem to feel we are some sort of professional and to give recognition
to others would detract from our own status. We seem to feel so
insecure we have to push others down to hold ourselves up.

**Modesto Bee, December 5, 1963**

“Pledge Support” by Officers and Staff, Stanislaus County
Employees Association, Modesto

We were shocked to realize that within this great land of ours was
one among us so warped and demented to be capable of performing
such an infamous act as the assassination of President John F.
Kennedy. We were saddened that our leader was taken from us in
the prime of his life, that his young family should be deprived of the
love and devotion of father and husband.

We feel a sense of guilt that we both collectively and individually
have not done all that is within our power to eliminate hatred and
bigotry. If there be a ray of light out of the darkness that descended
over us let it be in the form of a greater tolerance and understanding
of our fellow man and rededication of our lives to the principles of
freedom and human dignity that were so much a part of our late
President. We pledge our support to President Lyndon B. Johnson
and pray that God grant him the courage, strength, and wisdom to
execute the monumental responsibilities inherent in the highest
office our beloved country.

**Modesto Bee, December 5, 1963**

“Kennedy College” by Hopeful Candidates of Kennedy College
(Geralyn Brown, Sheri Brown, Debbie Brown, and Stevie Brown),
Turlock

Since John John [John F. Kennedy, Jr.] and Caroline’s mother saw
fit to bestow upon her husband’s grave in Arlington National
Cemetery an eternal flame to glow for the whole world to remember
him, it does seem appropriate that in this county of ours, with the
Stanislaus River, Stanislaus County Courthouse, and Stanislaus
County Library, we might reconsider and change the anonymous
identity of “our college.”

What could be more unselfish at this season of the year to be
given the opportunity, as well as the privilege, of christening “our
college” with a new historical name, characterizing a man,
dynamically interested in youth, “Kennedy College?” Then
perhaps, in our own small way we could help contribute in weaving
the pattern of peace, love, and goodwill and attempt to tell Caroline
and John John that the good things their father stood for did not
die but shall find life through our living memorial, our tribute for all
the world to see, Kennedy College, symbolizing the eternal flame of
knowledge.

**Modesto Bee, December 10, 1963**

“Rights for All People” by Noma Woods, Patterson

On November 22nd the world was stunned. How could our President
be dead? This is not a country where people would think of a thing
so terrible as that. We thought we must have been dreaming. But it
was real. Regardless of which political party we belong to everyone
must admit he admired John F. Kennedy’s quick smile and his
manner of telling the world of his ideals – no matter if we did not
always agree with what he said. This is a free America. Our
Declaration of Independence says, “All men are created equal.”
President Kennedy wanted that for all people. When Jack Ruby
took the law in his hands he took rights away from all of us. The
City of Dallas, the State of Texas, and families of Oswald and Ruby
should not be blamed for their crimes. We must never let hate
interfere with justice. We must have the courage to change the
things we can, to accept the things we cannot change, and the
wisdom to know the difference.

**Modesto Bee, December 16, 1963**

“JFK Memorial Gifts” by Mrs. Mary E. Coolidge, President,
Stanislaus Association for Retarded Children, Modesto

A story was told in the press recently of a Massachusetts school
bus of retarded children which was boarded by a tall man as it
waited for a stop light. He greeted each child. Then bidding them
to “be good children,” he returned to his own car.” The man was
our late President, John F. Kennedy.

Since the tragic death of the President, Stanislaus Association for
Retarded Children (SARC) has been asked by many persons and
organizations knowing of his great personal interest in this problem
if a way exists to make a memorial gift. Provision does exist for gifts
in memory of President Kennedy through the National Association
for Retarded Children (NARC) Research Fund, of which SARC is a
chapter.

With extraordinary vision, President Kennedy saw the many things
which need to be done to erase this problem which affects millions
of Americans today. He won for the mentally retarded and their
families legislation to provide giant forward steps for positive action
in the future.

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Speaking in October to the annual convention of the NARC he [President Kennedy] said, “I think we have an obligation as a country, especially a country as rich as ours, to make a major effort to see if we can block this, stop it and cure it.” He was talking about the tragic human waste caused by mental retardation. The NARC Research Fund is devoted to just such action. Those of the public who wish to contribute to a cause in memory of President Kennedy consider the NARC Research Fund.

Modesto Bee, December 19, 1963
“A Touching Memorial,” by L.G. Cahill, Jr., Staff Sergeant, USAF, Zweibrucken, West Germany
On the evening of November 22nd, the personnel assigned to this small U.S. base in Zweibrucken, West Germany, were relaxing with their families, watching a basketball game or sitting in the service clubs. They were doing these things until approximately 7:45 p.m. (Dallas, 12:45 p.m. CST) when the tragic news of the President’s shooting spread throughout the base in moments.

In their homes, people crowded around their radios, listening to the reports over the American Forces Network which was tied to the major overseas broadcasting networks via the transatlantic cable. At the basketball game, the players suddenly stopped and went over and started dressing. An officer announced President John F. Kennedy’s death. The crowd stood up with a sigh and filed out quietly. The ball was left in the middle of the court. Shocked, stunned silence greeted the news in the clubs. Some of the men were crying. Saddened, stunned, and with tears in their eyes, the personnel of this base reported to their duty stations with a look of new determination and purpose. A young Negro soldier with tears streaming down his face was heard to ask, “Now who will help us?”

The weekend was spent in shock, listening to the latest reports on the tragedy. Then on Monday morning a memorial service was held on the football field, with the Army, Navy, and Air Force personnel assigned to this base attending. As the services were beginning, German civilians, French soldiers, Canadian airmen, and German paratroopers from nearby bases and towns arrived, with their hats held over their hearts and tears in their eyes. These people, some 200 of them, joined our formation. After the services, these people very quietly walked over and started shaking hands with the American servicemen. It was the most touching act of friendship and expression of sympathy I ever have seen.

As a native Modestan my first thoughts were of my home town, my family, and my friends. Above this was the pride of serving the country for which President Kennedy had given his life for – the country we all love.

Modesto Bee, December 25, 1963
“Who Is to Blame?” by Norman Vander Veen, Modesto
It was most remarkable to see and hear the reaction following the tragic death of President John F. Kennedy. When the news reached Moscow, the communist news media immediately blamed this awful deed to the “racist and right wing elements,” and yet it was not even known who the assassin was.

The arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald as the murderer of our President made it clear this vile act was committed by a man who was a self-confessed Marxist-Leninist. The murderer was not a product of our way of life but an alien way which is committed to our destruction. He probably was not ordered to kill, but his deed was the logical result of what he was taught, that capitalism has to be destroyed including its chief. With all this evidence it should be clear who is to blame.

But some of our people and our press also have been saying these tragic events should be blamed on the so-called right wing extremists and that this is a result of hatred and bigotry, fed into the bloodstream of American life. Certainly this is a very strange reaction. I just cannot understand how you can blame anybody for something his opponent [a communist] has done.

I wonder who is doing the name calling and who is creating disunity and hatred in our midst? Could it be those who make false accusations against fellow Americans? This should be a time for our nation to unite and together oppose the common enemy [communism] instead of wasting our energy fighting each other. It would be far better to love our neighbors as ourselves. We do not have to agree on all issues but surely we can discuss the differences in a constructive spirit of understanding. This alone can strengthen our great nation and promote the cause of freedom for all mankind.

Latin Language
The following letters have been removed from the chronological sequence above, because they involve the issue of Latin language used in the Catholic Mass at St. Matthew’s Catholic Cathedral in Washington, D.C. on Sunday, November 24th, and at the graveside service the next day at Arlington National Cemetery. Both events were televised and aired on radio.

Kennedy was the first Catholic elected President, which was a controversy during the 1960 presidential campaign that was handled gingerly by Kennedy and his supporters. Still it was an issue that dogged him. In Houston, Texas, during the campaign, he spoke directly to the question before a crowd of 300, which was seen by millions on television across the nation. He opened his address with an immediate statement on the matter, declaring that:

“In America where the separation of church and state is absolute, I believe in a President whose views on religion are his own private affair, neither imposed on him by the nation or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office. I am not a Catholic candidate for President. I am the Democratic Party’s candidate for President, who happens to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me. If the time should come when my office would require me to either violate my conscience, or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office, and I would hope that any other conscientious public servant would do likewise.”

It was found by the Fair Campaign Practices Committee of the Senate that there was a greater volume of anti-Catholic literature in the 1960 presidential campaign than in 1928 when Al Smith, another
Catholic, ran for President. After Kennedy’s election in 1960, one enthusiastic supporter commented to him, “Well, that should lay to rest the religious issue!” Kennedy responded, “Not so, if he failed as President, never again could an adherent of a minority religion be elected.”

The “letter debate” in the Bee began when M.A. criticized the use of Latin in the Catholic Mass and graveside service in her letter to the editor. Millions heard and viewed the ceremony on television. Immediately others in the county took issue with her complaint and sent letters to the Bee in response. Religion was and will always be a touchy matter, because it’s personal. But, Americans will be Americans and when inclined will discuss controversial issues, “after all, it is a free country.” Newspapers then were a form of social media, especially the letters to the editor department, so the Latin Mass issue received a healthy public airing.

The following letters are instructive in regard to the religious climate of the time, especially locally, and also to evaluate where religious issues have come since. The assassination brought up the matter of intolerance, and here is M.A. stepping on sore toes so soon, probably without realizing that she was. This illustrates just how subtle intolerance really is. It may be a case of M.A. inheriting an isolationist ideology from her family, where anything foreign was of concern. And then it could have been simply a Reformation anti-Popish sentiment as it appears in the first reading. She seemed though to bear a normal acceptance of American Catholics and fully respected her nation’s President.

M.A. didn’t write a letter responding to her critics. At least one wasn’t printed in the newspaper. The full names of the letter writers have been reduced to initials for the sake of privacy, even though 50 years have passed. The first letter is from M.A., with the following letters responding to her.

**Modesto Bee, December 2, 1963**

“Disappointed in Service” by M.A., Modesto

In viewing the impressive funeral procession on television, the meeting of all of the world’s dignitaries was the most outstanding, the most respectful to our late President John F. Kennedy. The only thing to me that marred the solemn affair was the church service and at the graveside where the priest stood with his back to the congregation and did a lot of mumbo jumbo talk which must have meant little to a lot of people. I wonder what the reaction was of most of these dignitaries who came from far off lands and had to listen to a language few understood and in a voice that sounded flat. What kind of an image will they take home with them of American religion? I wonder honestly how many Catholics understood what the priest was talking about.

Is God’s word so secret it has to be spoken in a language few in America understand? Why not speak English when there must have been more than 200 million anxious to hear the word of the Lord? In all due respect to all Catholics, I think the Kennedys should have had this service in private. The biggest monument we in America could present to our late President would be to end all hatred here and everywhere. We too long have been hating, enough so to kill our President. I think every American can better himself and now is a good time to start. God bless America.

**Modesto Bee, December 5, 1963**

“Upholds Service” by A.B., Modesto

This is in reply to M.A.’s letter of December 2nd concerning the Catholic service on television for our beloved President John F. Kennedy. I think it was in very poor taste for her to express herself in such a manner at a time like this. She asked, “What must the dignitaries who attended have thought of a lot of mumbo jumbo talk which they didn’t understand?” May I point out that if we were to view a sermon for some dignitary in a far off country, chances are a lot of us would not understand theirs either. President Kennedy happened to be a Catholic, and may I say he did not use it as a crutch to further his ambitions but rather he added a quiet dignity to it and reserved it in a special place, which is as it should be. I deem it a privilege that we were able to view a faith which certainly must have helped to mold him into the great and wonderful man that he became.

**Modesto Bee, December 5, 1963**

“Religious Freedom” by R.A.M., Newman

In regard to the letter written by M.A., one of the main reasons this country was founded was freedom of religion. It makes no difference whether the man is big or small he has a right to live, die and be buried under his own religion. Whether other people understand it, believe in it or agree with it is of no importance. President John F. Kennedy and his family were not ashamed of their religion while he lived. Why should they be ashamed when he died? As for the priest of the “mumbo, jumbo talk,” he is a dedicated man, a Cardinal, one of the highest men of his religion, a man who has devoted his lifetime to his religion, even though it meant a great personal sacrifice. Let us all remember freedom of religion!

**Modesto Bee, December 6, 1963**

“Appropriate Language” by M.H., Modesto

I found the December 2nd letter headed “Disappointed in Service” to be a most tactless one. President John F. Kennedy’s funeral was not a “show” and a minister, priest or bishop need not be an actor. Being a Protestant and next to Anglo-Saxon, as if this would matter, I feel that before this assembly of mourners from all over the world, Latin was a most appropriate language. God does not only understand English. If one enters a church or takes part in any other religious service the language does not matter. I suppose a Moslem or Hindu service would be just as deep for a person of another belief, even if one would not understand a word. Does one need simultaneous interpretation at a funeral service? It was a good time to search one’s soul in any language. Besides, it would not hurt Americans to try to learn the languages of other people all over the world just as they try to learn ours. And let us all try to understand other people’s beliefs and respect them.

**Modesto Bee, December 6, 1963**

“Prayers in Latin” by Mrs. T. L., Oakdale

Regarding the letter of M.A. and later letters protesting the statements made, it appears both sides of the question are misunderstood. In all churches there is no question when the leader is talking to God, because of the attitude and reverence shown. So when she listened to only a hurried monotone, and I have never
heard Latin in the service otherwise, do not blame her for her conclusions. Prayer in any language would be recognized as given in the services she must attend. The wish of the bishops at the last ecumenical council to have some of the language of the people in the services shows they also recognize the great need for this.

Modesto Bee, December 6, 1963
“Try to Please God” by R.G., Patterson
I do not understand why some people criticized the solemn Catholic ceremony which was given to our late President. He and his family are proud of their religion. Why should they have had this service in private? To me the world dignitaries who came are intelligent persons. They know and understand the rights of the individual. They came because they loved our beloved President and wanted to pay final respects to him. When you love someone, you try to honor and respect his memory. Thank God we are in a free country where we have the right of free speech and religion. Do not try to please the world. Please God and let us start thinking right. Love our neighbors as ourselves and stop all the hatred. Amen.

Modesto Bee, December 6, 1963
“They Understood” by G.H., Riverbank
In reply to M.A. about the church and graveside services for our late President John F. Kennedy, I am sure the family understood what she calls “mumbo jumbo” as well as other Catholics. The people of the U.S. and the dignitaries from other countries who paid respect understood, knowing it was his faith and is the family’s faith. I believe there are Catholics in the countries these dignitaries came from, since the Catholic religion is universal and the service or Mass is not a secret.

Regardless of religions, our late President will be remembered as long as our world turns. And I am sure all Catholics as well as Protestants will offer their prayers for the late President and for our current President, Lyndon B. Johnson. I am a convert and my religion helped me so much when I lost my husband. I am sure God will bless all, regardless of color, creed or religion.

Modesto Bee, December 10, 1963
“Speaking to God” by W.M., Riverbank
In answer to M.A., I agree the dignitaries appearing at President John F. Kennedy’s funeral paid a great tribute to him. The fact he was mourned by as many in other countries as well as our own makes it even more tragic that we have lost such a great leader. The greatest disrespect for President Kennedy would have been to have his funeral in any church other than the one of his choice.

I agree we would be paying a great tribute to President Kennedy if from this moment all hatred and prejudice came to an end; however, are you free from prejudice? If so, then why did you not attempt to find out why the priest said the service as he did? It is really very simple to find out. Any priest would be happy to explain this to you.

I will not attempt to go into detail but a very simple explanation is the priest was not talking to the people. He was talking, or praying, to God in behalf of President Kennedy. Do you not agree that when we speak to God from our hearts that He understands, no matter what language we speak?

Modesto Bee, December 10, 1963
“We Must Seek Unity” by Mr. and Mrs. T.R.G., Modesto
In the midst of grief, shame, and heartache of the past two weeks, and the general closing of ranks in the aftermath of national tragedy, we were shocked and dismayed by the sentiments expressed in M.A.’s letter of December 2nd. In the last paragraph she appealed for an end to all hatred but all that went before is calculated only to increase an interfaith dissent at the very time when “all” religions are striving so valiantly to promote material understanding and harmony. The writer wondered about the “reaction of these dignitaries who came from far off lands and had to listen to a language few understood.”

We are quite sure President Charles de Gaulle, who does not understand English, does understand Latin. So do King Baudouin and Queen Frederika, Chancellor Erhard and President De Valera of Ireland and many others. Religion is not American, or French, or German. Religion is universal. The language of religion is universal, whether the words are pronounced in Latin, or Russian, or Swahili. Surely God, who is the author of speech, understands all languages. He has had billions of prayers addressed to Him in Latin in the past 19 centuries.

Let us by all means put an end to hatred and smallness of spirit. The indispensable prerequisite for this is humility. In the last message President John F. Kennedy addressed to the nation, the Thanksgiving proclamation, he said, “We must seek every day to emulate the humility which our forefathers possessed. We need humility to acknowledge that many things we do not understand are comprehensible to millions of others. And that many things we do not agree with are sacred to millions of others.” President Kennedy once said we must unite for progress toward a world made safe for diversity. We must seek unity.

RLS

Resources consulted for the SHQ issue: Modesto Bee; Turlock Journal; Belin’s Final Disclosure; Dallek’s Unfinished Life; Permet’s JFK; and Mailer’s Oswald’s Tale

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JACK AND JACQUELINE
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

The information for this brief biography comes primarily from articles that appeared after the assassination in the Modesto Bee and Turlock Journal and read by Stanislaus County residents.

Youth

Jackie

Jack married Jacqueline Bouvier, 23, on September 12, 1953, in Newport, RI. She was from a wealthy New England Catholic family and lived in New York City and Washington, D.C. She gave birth to a daughter, Caroline, in 1957 and a son, John, Jr., in 1960.

Presidency

John “Jack” Fitzgerald Kennedy was born on May 29, 1917 at his family’s Brookline home, just outside Boston, to Joseph and Rose Kennedy, whose parents were from Ireland. The sibling order was: Joseph, Jr., John, Rosemary, Kathleen, Eunice, Patricia, Jean, Robert, and Edward.

As a child, Jack was a sickly boy, being bed-ridden frequently with cases of bronchitis, chicken pox, German measles, measles, mumps, scarlet fever, and whooping cough. It was in his sickbed that he learned the pleasure of reading, where he pored over children books, such as Sinbad the Sailor, Peter Pan, Black Beauty, and King Arthur and the Round Table. He graduated from Choate Prep School and Harvard University. He studied for a time at the London School of Economics and Stanford University. In 1940, he published his first book entitled Why England Slept, which was his senior history thesis paper at Harvard that was revised for publishing. The book’s theme was England’s lack of military preparation to counter Hitler’s military buildup. Jack spent much time before the war in England where his father was the U.S. Ambassador. His father was one of the wealthiest men in the U.S., having accumulated a fortune through banking, real estate, and stock and bond investment. President Roosevelt appointed him chairman of the newly organized Securities and Stock Exchange Commission.

Jack’s World War II service became a nationally known story. As a Navy lieutenant he commanded a torpedo boat, PT109, which was rammed and split apart by a Japanese destroyer near the Soloman Islands. His heroics in saving his crew were told in his book Profiles in Courage that won the 1956 Pulitzer Prize for Autobiography and Biography.

Joe, Jr.; Joe, Sr., and Jack in 1938
Kennedy Library photo

Jack had complete confidence in his ability though to manage the nation. He commented about the presidency shortly after his election: “Sure it’s a big job. But I don’t know anybody who can do it any better than I can. I’m going to be in it for four years. It isn’t going to be so bad. You’ve got time to think – and besides, the pay is good.” In his inauguration day speech in 1961, youthful but erudite President Kennedy heralded a change in America by proclaiming: “Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans – born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a cold and bitter peace.”

Handsome and witty Jack, his attractive wife Jackie, and their beautiful children thrilled the nation. They were the most photogenic and popular First Family since Teddy Roosevelt. They were active and wholesome looking, being written about in movie magazines and spoken about at night clubs and on television, especially by comedians. They had become part of the celebrity crowd, hobnobbing with Hollywood stars. Newspapers and periodicals routinely carried articles about them. Franklin Roosevelt had seen similar popularity in his early years as President. And as with FDR, popularity meant nothing when it came to the pragmatics.
of being the President. What counted was how the President did his job with Congress and foreign leaders, and those roads were riddled with chuckholes.

**Governmental Problems**

His first few months in office were devoted to internal affairs, especially the state of the U.S. economy. He clashed with Big Steel and other major manufacturers. He forced them to rescind price increases, which brought an instant label of “anti-business,” something he was never to shake. There were some economic proposals of his that did win support of American business. His liberal friends in the Democratic Party began identifying him with his predecessor Republican President Eisenhower, claiming disappointedly that Kennedy’s policies were middle-of-the-road.

Soon though civil rights for Negroes (name used at the time) replaced the economy as the President’s number one domestic issue. In the spring of 1963, there were Negro demonstrations, sit-ins, and marches, which became so serious that Kennedy called them threats to public order. To resolve the growing clamor for civil rights, he launched civil rights legislation in Congress, and he used his own personal influence to bring whites and blacks together to discuss the problems. Some of the racial issues that Kennedy was trying to resolve were nearly 100 years old, with equality being the central concern. Rev. Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, head of the United Presbyterian Church of USA, commented that Kennedy “gave all his personal commitment and political skill to advance justice.” He was the first to see that America needed “to change its racial attitudes and to amend its racial practices hardly short of a voluntary revolution.”

Kennedy was dogged on the campaign trail by reporters and the opposition concerning his Catholic faith. In an effort to put the controversy to rest, Rev. Blake declared that “Short as was John Kennedy’s time in office, it was long enough to make it abundantly clear that those who had feared, for any reason, a Roman Catholic President, had misunderstood both the man and his church.”

**Health**

Kennedy was a strong proponent of exercise. In an address at the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame, he declared that:

“We are under-exercised as a nation. We watch instead play, ride instead of walk. We have become more and more, not a nation of athletes, but a nation of spectators.” It was difficult for him to engage personally in physical activity, because of his poor health and physical issues, but he still managed to do his best by playing golf and sailing, doing daily pushups and swimming in the White House pool. Bobby Kennedy wrote in 1964 that “at least one-half of the days that he spent on this earth were days of intense physical pain.”

In the spring of 1961, while planting a ceremonial tree in Ottawa, Canada, he strained his weak back, requiring him to use crutches. When he met with Soviet Union Premier Khrushchev in a summit meeting in Vienna, he was still hampered with back pain. He also suffered from colds during this period, but he had put on weight, looking beefier.

**Cuba**

The Cold War was as hot as ever, but as President Kennedy declared in his inaugural address, he and his generation were “tempered by war, disciplined by a cold and bitter peace.” Now he would have to demonstrate that capability when encountering the Soviet Union and communism in Cuba and Vietnam. Kennedy inherited the Bay of Pigs Invasion plans from the Eisenhower administration. Anti-Castro forces were to attack Cuba with anti-Castro forces at the Bay of Pigs. The President, his advisors, and military leaders decided to implement the invasion plans. It ended in disaster, when Kennedy decided not to authorize American air support. He took full blame for the invasion’s failure that took hundreds of lives, tarnishing U.S. reputation.

While the Bay of Pigs was a fiasco, in October 1962, Kennedy was triumphant in his handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis. He wanted Soviet missiles removed from Cuba and ordered a blockade to stop any further deliveries. The two countries came close to nuclear war, but Soviet cargo ships turned back to Russia. Through careful strategy, Kennedy was successful in preventing a nuclear war and had Soviet missiles removed from Cuba. After a Geneva summit meeting in 1961, Khrushchev thought he could manipulate the young American President for communist purposes, but Kennedy showed him differently. In July 1963, Khrushchev, Kennedy, and Great Britain signed the Atomic Test-Ban Treaty, banning atomic bomb testing except for underground explosions.

**Legislative Highlights**

Provided below are legislative highlights of the Kennedy Administration, composed by Associated Press and published in the *Bee*, November 24, 1963:

“Increased the minimum wage from $1 an hour to $1.25; ratified the 23rd Amendment to the Constitution providing residents of the District of Columbia the right to vote in national elections; increased Social Security benefits and liberalizing requirements for qualifying; created the Peace Corps to aid underdeveloped countries; passage of a aircraft hijacking law punishable by penalties up to death; adopted a $600 million aid program for Latin America and creation of Alliance for Progress; passage of the Trade Expansion Act, which gave the President the unprecedented power to cut tariffs; approved legislation to purchase up to $100 million in United Nations bonds..."
to help tide the UN over a financial crisis; approved a tax revision measure of $1 billion, allowing special tax credits to business; adopted a congressional resolution calling for armed resistance, if necessary, to counter aggressive or subversive activities by Cuba’s communist regime in other countries in the Western Hemisphere; passage of legislation providing presidential authority to call up 150,000 members of the ready reserve to meet possible emergencies; supported congressional approval of a constitutional amendment outlawing the poll tax as a qualification for voting in elections for federal office; established a private corporation to develop, own, and operate a communications satellite system; adopted new federal powers to protect the public against hazardous drugs; and adopted new postal rates, including a rise from 4 to 5 cents for first class letters.”

Children

During the ten years of marriage, Jackie suffered several miscarriages. A miscarriage of a baby girl occurred in 1956, just after the Democratic Convention, while Jack was on a brief tour in France. Their son, John, Jr. was born premature on November 25, 1960, while Jack was flying to Florida to meet with others concerning his New Frontier program. On August 7, 1963, Jackie gave birth to Patrick by Caesarian section at Otis Air Force Base Hospital in Massachusetts, but the child succumbed within 40 hours. Jack was in Washington, D.C. at time, causing him rush to the hospital but missed the birth of the child. For the next three months, Jackie stayed away from the limelight, with her first social appearance occurring on Wednesday, November 20, 1963, when the President and she entertained more than 600 guests. The next day, they flew to Texas.

November 22nd

Syndicated articles in the Bee and Turlock Journal informed the public of the dreadful ordeal Jackie went through on November 22nd and the following weeks. An AP article written by informed the public of the dreadful ordeal Jackie went through on November 22nd and the following weeks. An AP article written by

They spent Thanksgiving weekend at Hyannis Port with the family, returning Sunday, December 1st to the White House.

Transitions for Jackie and Children

On December 3rd, congressional legislation was passed quickly, providing Jackie with six months of secretarial help, costing $50,000; two Secret Service agents; free postage; and fully paid expenses for her slain husband’s funeral. Jackie decided to move the bodies of her two dead children and have them buried next to their father at Arlington National Cemetery. The bodies were flown to Washington, D.C., being accompanied by their Uncle Ted Kennedy. A brief funeral service was held at Arlington National Cemetery on December 6th, with Jackie, her sister Princess Lee Radziwill, Ted, and Robert Kennedy in attendance. According to federal law, minor children and unmarried daughters of any qualifying serviceman or woman were permitted burial at Arlington.

The next day Jackie and her children moved from the White House to a residence on N Street in Georgetown. The mansion was loaned to her by Undersecretary of State Averell Harriman, until she located a permanent dwelling in Washington, D.C. That same day, Robert and Ted Kennedy met with Harvard University President Nathan M. Pusey to announce publicly that two acres of land on the Harvard campus was set aside for the John F. Kennedy Memorial Library. It was noted that the property had been deeded to the U.S. Bureau of Archives. The library would have a view of the dormitory where President Kennedy lived while at Harvard. On December 7th, the Kennedys and Pusey launched a campaign to raise $6 million to construct the building. The library project had been discussed by President Kennedy and Pusey on October 21, 1963, a month before the assassination.

On December 10th, it was reported that the five pet dogs at the White House had been given to mansion employees. One of the dogs was “Pushinka,” who was a gift to Kennedy by Khrushchev, it being an offspring of the well-known Soviet space dog. On December 12th, Jackie purchased a 14-room, Georgetown residence on N Street for $190,000. It was a historic dwelling of 169 years, having a price drop from $225,000. It was announced on December 29th that Princess Lalla Aicha of Morocco had given Jackie a century old mansion in the Middle East resort of Marakesh. The Princess’ brother was King Hassan of Morocco. Mrs. Kennedy accepted the gift and commented that she and the children would spend vacation there.

Jackie and her children spent the Christmas holiday in Palm Beach, FL in the home of Colonial C. Michael Paul. She and her sister Princess Lee visited Jackie’s father-in-law, Joseph Kennedy, who was in residence nearby at his winter mansion. Jackie and President Kennedy spent Christmas holidays in 1961 and 1962 at the Paul residence. Robert Kennedy was also present during the holidays. He and Jackie and her children went shopping at a toy
store in Palm Beach. No one noticed them at first, with the children playing freely with the store’s toys. But then they were seen, with a significant crowd developing, causing them to depart the store.

President Kennedy’s will was read in Boston, having been composed in June 1954. The President’s estate was divided equally into two trusts, with Robert and Ted acting as the trustees. One trust belonged to Jackie, while the other one to the two children. Jackie received a cash gift immediately. Each beneficiary (Jackie, Carolyn, and John, Jr.) was to receive annually 10 percent of their trust. When the children reached 21, they would take control of their share of the trust.

In mid-January, Jackie and her children returned to Georgetown from Palm Beach. She addressed the public for the first time since the assassination. At her brother-in-law Bobby’s office, she told the nation that she had received over 800,000 messages from people throughout the world. It was her hope to read them someday “whenever I can bear to. All of his light is gone from this world. All of you who have written to me know how much we all loved him and that he returned that love in full measure.” Jackie noted that all of the messages would be placed in the Kennedy Memorial Library at Harvard for anyone to read. She commented that the library “was not just a memorial to President Kennedy, but a living center of study of the times in which he lived and for young people and scholars from all over the world.” Ending, she declared that “the affection for my husband held by all of you has sustained me, and the warmth of these tributes is something I shall never forget.”

Nixon

One cannot discuss Jack Kennedy without mentioning one of the most fascinating political personalities of the times, Dick Nixon. Jack and he were both Navy officers during World War II and were friends as youthful men in the House of Representatives. Their offices were across the hall from each other and knew each other well. Jack had it all, the wealth, the charm, the wit, the intellect, a very powerful father and family, and he was a war hero; whereas, Dick had none of that. He was brilliant in his own way and always the schemer, but he was no match for Jack. But, Dick did win once against Jack. He served as Vice President for eight years, one heartbeat from being President, while Jack was still a Senator from the small state of Massachusetts. Then came the 1960 election, the TV debates, and Nixon’s crushing loss to Kennedy for the biggest prize in the nation, the presidency. Afterwards, Dick campaigned for California governor in 1962, losing that election, and telling reporters, “You won’t have Nixon to kick around any more.” On November 20, 1963, Dick Nixon was in Dallas. It was two days before the assassination. Nixon wrote about it in his book RN:

“I flew to Dallas on November 20 to attend a board meeting of the Pepsi-Cola Company, one of our firm’s clients. Several local reporters asked for an interview, and the next day I met with them briefly at my hotel. I had read that demonstrations were planned against Kennedy and Johnson, who were to visit Dallas the next day. I told the reporters that, however strongly people felt about particular issues or personalities, the President and Vice President deserved to be treated with respect wherever they appeared. Early on the morning of November 22nd on the way to the Dallas airport I saw the flags displayed along the motorcade route for the presidential visit.”

Nixon learned about the assassination while riding in a cab that was taking him to his residence in Manhattan. While traveling through Queens, the cab stopped and someone yelled out, “I just heard that Kennedy was shot!” Nixon wrote in RN:

“A hundred thoughts rushed through my mind. The man could have been crazy or a macabre prankster. . . . perhaps a gunman might have shot at Kennedy and missed or only wounded him. I refused to believe that he could have been killed. As the cab drew up in front of my building, the doorman ran out. Tears were streaming down his cheeks. ‘Oh Mr. Nixon, have you heard, sir?’ he asked. ‘It’s just terrible. They’ve killed President Kennedy.’

A little later, Nixon telephoned Hoover at the FBI in Washington, D.C. Nixon wrote:

“I asked, ‘What happened? Was it one of the right-wing nuts?’ ‘No,’ he replied, ‘it was a communist.’ Months later Hoover told me that Oswald’s wife had disclosed that Oswald had been planning to kill me when I visited Dallas and that only with great difficulty had she managed to keep him in the house to prevent him from doing so. . . . After eight years as Vice President I had become fatalistic about the danger of assassination. I knew that given the number of people who, for whatever reasons, want to kill a President, it takes a combination of luck and the law of averages to keep him alive. I did not think of Kennedy and myself as interchangeable. I did not think that if I had won in 1960 it would have been I rather than he riding through Dealey Plaza in Dallas at that time, on that day. Since the 1960 election there had been no love lost between Kennedy and me; I have been critical of his performance as President. I admired his ambition and his competitiveness, and I could feel the terrible impact this tragedy would have on his closely knit family. I wished that there was something that I could do to ease their grief. That night I sat up late in my library. Long after the fire had gone out, I wrote a letter to Jacqueline Kennedy:

Dear Jackie:

In this tragic hour Pat and I want you to know that our thoughts and prayers are with you. While the hand of fate made Jack and me political opponents I always cherished the fact that we were personal friends from the time we came to the Congress together in 1947. That friendship evidenced itself in many ways including the invitation we received to attend your wedding. Nothing I could say now could add to the splendid tributes which have come from throughout the world to him. But I want you to know that the nation will also be forever grateful for your service as First Lady. You brought to the White House charm, beauty and elegance as the official hostess for America, and the mystique of the young in heart which was uniquely yours made an indelible impression on the American consciousness. If in the days ahead we could be helpful in any way we shall be honored to be at your command. Sincerely, Dick Nixon

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A few weeks later Nixon received a letter from Jackie:

Dear Mr. Vice President:
I do thank you for your most thoughtful letter – You two young men – colleagues in Congress – adversaries in 1960 – and now look what has happened – Whoever thought such a hideous thing could happen in this country – I know how you must feel – so long on the path – so closely missing the greatest prize – and now for you all, the question comes up again – and you must commit all you and your family’s hopes and efforts again – Just one thing I would say to you – If it does not work out as you have hoped for so long – please be consoled by what you already have – your life and your family – We never value life enough when we have it – and I would not have had Jack live his life any other way – though I know his death could have been prevented, and I will never cease to torture myself with that – But if you do not win – please think of all that you have – with my appreciation and my regards to your family. I hope your daughters love Chapin School as much as I did. Sincerely, Jacqueline Kennedy

Kennedy’s Health

After a multitude of childhood illnesses, Jack’s tonsils and adenoids were removed in 1933. He was diagnosed with colitis in 1934, with him having digestive troubles from there on. It was thought that colitis was caused by celiac disease, which was a nutritional problem. In 1937, he began treatment with steroids for Addison’s Disease which he took until his death. It was felt that this brought on Cushing’s Disease, which caused Kennedy to have a duodenal ulcer, insufficient functioning of adrenal glands, slow atrophy of muscles, osteoporosis, back problems, tanned skin, and “moon facies” or a round face.

He suffered from urethritis (urethra inflammation) and prostatitis (prostate inflammation) beginning in 1940. These two conditions were caused by unprotected sex, for which he took sulfa drugs. While in the Navy during World War II, he had problems with severe spastic colitis and injured his back severely from the destruction of his PT boat and rescue efforts. While pleasure swimming off the Solomon Islands, he was severely cut by coral, becoming infected and hospitalized for ten days with fatigue. He contracted yellow fever as well there, causing a green complexion on his skin. In 1947, he was given one year to live by a London physician, because of Addison’s Disease. While on his way home aboard a ship, he was given last rites, because he was gravely ill.

In 1954-54, he underwent major back surgery, remaining in the hospital for several months. After one surgery, he had an urinary tract infection and then a transfusion reaction, causing him to be in a coma momentarily. In 1955, he had a B1 deficiency and was given hemoglobin. His thyroid functioned sub-normally and was given iodine daily thereafter. Some of the medications he was taking during the 1950s were anti-spasmodics, painkillers, testosterone, antibiotics, and sleeping pills.

After the 1960 presidential campaign, he was tired and lacked clarity of mind. For the first six months as President he took several drugs, namely: cortisone, lomotil, paregotic, phenobarbital, testosterone, trasentine, tunial, amphetamines, and pain killers. Some were injected and some were taken orally. He dismissed concerns about the amount of medication he took, saying that he didn’t care as long as they worked. He was constantly aware of his mortality, not only because of his health, but because he lost two siblings in airplane accidents, his brother Joe and sister Kathleen. This weighed heavily on him, especially his sister, who he adored. He fully expected to die young, which might have caused him to seek the presidency at an early age and to have a multitude of sexual encounters.

A White House aide described Kennedy as having “an inner hardness, often volatile anger, beneath the outwardly amiable, thoughtful, carefully controlled demeanor.” Kennedy described himself as “always on the edge of irritability.” To help his weak back, he used a back brace made of canvas, having metal stays and padding. Kennedy was 6 feet tall, weighing 115 lbs. as a teenager and 155-160 lbs. between ages 20 to 43. In the White House he gained 15 to 20 lbs.

A Well Kept Secret

The picture of JFK’s life would not be complete, unfortunately, without mentioning the fact that he was a womanizer. In this he was just as notorious as his father and his father-in-law, John Bouvier. Jack’s continuous philandering began in his teen years and continued through his marriage and into the White House. His appetite was enormous, with some contributing it to his hormonal treatments for Addison’s Disease, which he began in 1937. His excessive sexual activity was kept from the public, with those close to him knowing of its extent. It became of serious concern to his brother Bobby, his chief campaign strategist, during election years. This and Jack’s extensive medical record, especially his numerous medications, were troublesome issues that could derail his political life at any time. There was worry by insiders that his sexual activities, medications, and poor health might affect his performance as President.

It was a different era then, when lecherous lives of important public figures weren’t reported by the press. It was a custom and an unwritten code among men not to intrude, besides the writers themselves had similar secrets to protect. This practice would end though in the 1970s when public officials became open game in regard to ethics. Women’s liberation had an effect, now with women politicians and exploitation of women by men being an explosive issue.

Rose Kennedy was quite aware of her husband’s philandering from the beginning of their marriage. The same with Jackie, she knew of her husband’s liaisons, which strained their relationship, causing a certain coldness. Jackie’s mother divorced Jackie’s father because of his womanizing, so Jackie was very aware of the difficulties it caused in marriages. In the 1970s, Jack’s carousing became known to the public. This revelation seriously tarnished his reputation as a forthright family man. At first, many didn’t believe that he was an active philanderer and at the White House as well. There are books that provide a fuller picture for those who are interested.

Written by Robert LeRoy Santos
LYNDON B. JOHNSON
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

The information in this brief biography comes primarily from articles that appeared after the assassination in the Modesto Bee and Turlock Journal and read by Stanislaus County residents.

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born on August 27, 1908 near Johnson City, TX, being the eldest son of Rebekah Baines Johnson and Samuel Ealy Johnson, Jr., a school teacher and Texas legislator. He attended public schools in Johnson City, graduating from high school in 1924. He found work in road construction, earning $1 a day. Wanting to see the Far West, he traveled to California, working in Imperial Valley for a year. He then returned to Texas and was employed in road construction once more.

Having had enough of manual labor and traveling, Johnson decided he needed a college education, enrolling in February 1927 at Southwest Texas State Teachers College in San Marcos, TX. Because he was self-supportive, he found part-time work as a janitor, door-to-door salesman, and other odd jobs. In 1928, he worked fulltime as teacher in Tulia, TX. He used his first paycheck to purchase P.E. equipment at the school, whose students were mostly impoverished Mexican-American children.

After one year of teaching, he returned to Southwest Texas State, graduating in August 1930. He then taught school in Houston for two years, and then began his life in politics by serving as secretary to Congressman Richard Kleberg, a Texas Democrat. He worked for the Congressman in Washington, D.C. until 1935. In the meantime, he married Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson on November 17, 1934. He attended law school part-time, and in 1935 was appointed by President Roosevelt to be the Texas administrator for the National Youth Administration.

In 1937, Johnson was elected to the House of Representatives from the 10th Congressional District in Texas. He was reelected several times, remaining a Texas congressman until 1948. Being politically astute, he masterminded his colleagues’ congressional campaigns to retain the Democratic Party’s leadership of the House. In 1941, he took an interest in running for U.S. Senate when the seat was vacated by the death of Texas Senator Morris Sheppard. He wasn’t successful, losing by 1,311 votes to Texas Governor W. Lee O’Daniel.

In December 1941, Johnson cast his vote to declare war on Japan and Germany, and within hours he joined the Army Air Force, being the first congressman to do so. He was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry in air combat over New Guinea. President Roosevelt ordered all congressmen to resign from the military and return to their congressional posts at the Capitol where they were needed most.

In 1948, Johnson opposed Texas Governor Coke Stevenson for the U.S. Senate, this time winning by 87 votes. His Senate colleagues jokingly called him “Landslide Lyndon.” In his campaign, he hired a helicopter to fly over parts of Texas, with him using a speaker phone, bellowing out, “Hello down there! This is your candidate Lyndon Johnson!” as they flew over potential voters.

Johnson was appointed Chairman of the Armed Services Preparedness Subcommittee in 1950, and in 1951, he was unanimously elected to serve as the Democratic Party’s Whip in the Senate. He won praise from his colleagues for his tireless effort and his ability as a “can-do” Senator. Senator William Proxmire, Wisconsin Democrat, complained publicly that Johnson was running a one-man show, reducing Democrats to no more than yes-men. Johnson was tough in his effort to enforce party discipline, especially since there were major disagreements between northern liberals and southern conservatives.

When Eisenhower was elected President in 1952, Republicans candidates rode on his coattails, taking control of the Senate. Johnson then became the Minority Leader of the Senate. In 1954, he was reelected Senator, with Democrats retaking control of the Senate. His colleagues elected him Majority Leader in 1955, making him the youngest Senator at 46 to hold the position in Senate history.

On July 2, 1955, Johnson suffered a heart attack, being hospitalized in Washington, D.C. He rested at his Texas ranch for five months, returning to the Senate on December 12th. At the Democratic National Convention in 1956, southern Democrats sought Johnson’s nomination for President, but he lost to Adlai Stevenson. In the Senate in 1957, Johnson guided through the first civil rights legislation in nearly a century. In 1958, Eisenhower asked him to speak to the United Nations in support of a U.S. resolution for the peaceful exploration of outer space.

Being enormously popular in Texas, in 1959 the state legislature passed the “Johnson for President Bill” that allowed his candidacy for both President and Senator on the 1960 Texas state ballot. At the 1960 Democratic Party Convention in Los Angeles, he lost his bid to John Kennedy for the party’s presidential nomination but agreed to be on the ticket as Vice President. Before balloting began at the convention, Kennedy and Johnson had harsh words. Kennedy had grass root support in the North and the West, while Johnson was hampered, because he was a Southerner and had close ties to conservative oil interests. But for those same reasons Kennedy needed him on the ticket to give it a liberal-conservative balance. Kennedy toned down the rift between the two, and they defeated Republicans Nixon and Lodge in the November election. Johnson was also reelected Senator but resigned when he took office as Vice President.

As Vice President, it was said that Johnson was bored and dissatisfied with his responsibilities and power limitations. He had
been bitter not winning the party’s presidential nomination in 1960 and really didn’t want to be Vice President. On November 22, 1963, Johnson was sworn in as U.S. President, succeeding the assassinated President Kennedy.

Reporter Harry Ferguson of UPI, wrote an article on President Johnson, appearing in the Turlock Journal on November 25, 1963, with the title: “Our New President: He’s a Master of Art of Politics.” Ferguson characterized LBJ as “a single-minded man, who talks, eats, and thinks politics throughout the most strenuous work schedules in Washington, D.C.” Johnson called politics “the art of the possible” for which he became the master artist. When he worked for Texas Congressman Kleberg in the early 1930s, Kleberg told him “Don’t waste your time on the impossible. Concentrate on the possible.”

Ferguson remarked that Johnson had a “passion for information and listened intently.” As a Senator, Johnson had a saying mounted on his office wall that stated: “When you’re talkin’, you ain’t learnin’ nothin’.” It was a quote from his father. Ferguson wrote that Johnson’s “mind soaked up information like a sponge, and he constantly demanded more. He wanted everything checked and rechecked. He was never far from a telephone. In fact, he had one attached to a tree in the backyard of his Austin, Texas home. He paced as he talked, carrying a long extension cord with him.”

It was said that there wasn’t a soul in the Senate that didn’t owe Johnson a political debt, and “he knew exactly how and when to demand payment.” Ferguson remarked that President Johnson “doesn’t scare easily.” Once, President Eisenhower called him on the phone in the Senate complaining that Democrats were “not cooperating enough with his legislative program.” Johnson was short with Ike, saying, “We are not going to carry out instructions like a bunch of second lieutenants.”

Richard Rodda of McClatchy Newspapers wrote about a conservative Johnson speaking like a liberal. The article appeared in the Bee on November 25, 1963. The Vice President was in Sacramento on August 11, 1963, addressing 1,000 cheering attendees of the Democratic Party’s California Central Committee. He felt at home out West, because he always felt he was a Westerner and not a Southerner. He told them he fully endorsed President Kennedy’s civil rights program, and:

“We know it is wrong that Americans who fight alongside other Americans in war should not be prevented from working alongside them, eating alongside them, winning promotions alongside them, or sending their children to sit in schools alongside children of other Americans. We are determined that this oldest and most difficult of all domestic problems must be solved by a responsible nation, working together at every level. And we know that America will be a stronger nation and Americans will all enjoy a more peaceful and more rewarding life together when problems of human rights are resolved.”

An editorial in the Bee on December 5, 1963 outlined President Johnson’s political history. The writer felt that LBJ was more liberal than most thought. Johnson was a pragmatist and an internationalist. Some of the legislation he supported was: Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) of the 1930s and subsequent public power programs; the Lend-Lease Act of 1941 to help Great Britain; liberal trade agreements; liberal aid to public school programs; hospital aid to aged under Social Security; staunch supporter of a strong military force; active supporter of civil rights; and a major supporter of the American space program, having been chairman of the Senate’s Space Committee.

On November 28, 1963, President Johnson recommended to James J. Rowley, head of the Secret Service, that agent Rufus W. Youngblood, 39, be awarded the agency’s highest award for his action in Dallas. It was Youngblood who covered Johnson when shots were fired. Vice President Johnson was in a vehicle with U.S. Senator Ralph Yarborough, two cars behind the presidential limousine. Youngblood pushed Johnson down in the seat, lying on top of him all the way to the hospital. Humbly, Youngblood told the press that “any agent in the service would have done the same thing.”

On December 6, 1963, Mrs. Johnson felt that she and her husband needed to be at the White House for Christmas instead of at their Texas ranch. She wanted to carry forth with plans Jackie had made for the holidays at the mansion. That same day, President Johnson presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House to 31 leaders in government, science, business, and the arts. The award had been conceived by President Kennedy, and Kennedy pre-selected those that Johnson honored on December 6th. President Johnson added one more recipient of the Medal. He presented it to President John F. Kennedy, posthumously, with Robert Kennedy accepting the award for his brother while Jackie looked on from a small dining room.

In Grand Expectations by James T. Patterson, the author noted that President Johnson was resentful that “the Kennedy people did not rally unconditionally to his side in 1963.” Johnson had been perplexed by JFK’s meteoric rise in popularity. He once told a biographer:

“It was the darnest thing. He never said a word of importance in the Senate and he never did a thing. But somehow, he managed to create the image of himself as a shining intellectual, a youthful leader who would change the face of the country. Now, I will admit that he had a good sense of humor and that he looked awfully good on the darn television screen and through it all was a pretty decent fellow, but his growing hold on the American people was a mystery to me.”

Johnson was a tough personality, vain at times, loving recognition, and could be tyrannical. But, he did not dislike Jack Kennedy, because JFK was hardworking, a loyal Democrat, and promoted what was best for the nation. Kennedy included him in important presidential matters, knowing that Johnson would be President if something should happened to him. He also needed the gritty Texan’s wise counsel. Johnson loyally completed Kennedy’s term as President, supporting Jack’s programs and legislation. Even though, Bobby Kennedy and Johnson were political foes, Bobby respected Lyndon Johnson for this.

Written by Robert LeRoy Santos
LEE HARVEY OSWALD
A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

This is additional information on Lee Harvey Oswald that was not provided in the other articles, though there could be an occasional redundancy. The sources used for this article were the Modesto Bee, Turlock Journal, and a few important book publications.

Psychotic Oswald
President Kennedy’s assassin Oswald was a troubled person, psychotic and delusional, one who sought notoriety, which he attained much to the misfortune of President Kennedy, his family, and the nation. He assassinated the President of a nation that he felt alienated him, for which he held deep-seated resentment. But ironically, he missed enjoying the worldwide notoriety he sought, because he was cut down first. He missed it all. A man with delusions of grandeur had killed the most powerful man in the world, but it all ended there, because a crime of such magnitude reaps quick retribution. Oswald to his consternation found that out soon enough.

Oswald’s Youth
Oswald’s mother, Marguerite, was born in 1907 in New Orleans and was motherless within two years, when her mother died. Marguerite refused to disclose what she did for the next 22 years when asked after the assassination. She told her story from 1929 when she married a Mr. Pic, but Mr. Pic didn’t want a family, so she left him when she was three months pregnant. She gave birth to a son, John E. Pic, which Mr. Pic supported until he was 18. John E. Pic joined the Air Force and was serving as a hospital laboratory technician at the time of his brother Oswald’s death.

Marguerite’s next married Robert Edward Lee Oswald, who was a salesman for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. His name was taken from the Confederate General Robert E. Lee, of which Lee Harvey Oswald boasted. Marguerite and Robert Oswald’s first child was born in April 1934 and named Robert Edward Lee Oswald Jr. Their second child was born on October 18, 1939 in New Orleans, being named Lee Harvey Oswald. In the seventh month of pregnancy with Lee, her husband expired with a heart attack, something that was detrimental to the boys’ rearing. Marguerite was destitute, without any financial income, but she received $3,500 from the insurance company, and she sold her house, allowing them to live for a time. After depleting those funds, she found work, normally in shops; however, this forced her to place her oldest two sons in a Lutheran orphanage, while Lee received care from his aunt and babysitters.

At the age of 3, Lee joined his brothers at the orphanage, remaining there until he was 5. Marguerite married Edward K. Eckdahl, and they lived in Fort Worth with Lee. Eckdahl provided a comfortable living for them, but it was not a good marriage. After Lee’s death in 1963, Marguerite commented, “Lee was such a fine, high class boy. He didn’t waste time with comic books and trashy things. On Sundays, I’d take him to church, and then we’d have lunch somewhere and go to the zoo. He knew the names of every animal there, and to the planetarium, he just knew everything about the stars.”

Troubles Begin
In August 1952, Marguerite and Lee moved to New York City, living in apartments at various locations. He began working at odd jobs after school at an early age to help supplement his mother’s income. At 13 and 14 his academic grades were “Barely Passing,” and in areas of dependability, cooperation, and self-control, they were “Unsatisfactory.” Comments by his teachers on his report cards read: “quick tempered,” “constantly losing control,” and “getting into battles with others.”

Lee was arrested at the Bronx Zoo for being truant and then discovered that he hadn’t registered at Public School 44. Juvenile officials categorized him as “beyond the control of his mother insofar as school attendance.” Marguerite appeared in court on March 12, 1953 concerning the problem, while Lee refused to attend. He was registered at the school on March 23rd, but on April 16th, the judge remanded him to a facility called “Youth House” for psychiatric study. A psychological evaluation found that Lee had above average intelligence, but he demonstrated schizophrenic tendencies. He harbored a great deal of hostility towards his mother and society, because he felt unloved and unaccepted. He was detached from reality and had delusions of grandeur. He fantasized about towering over people. Overall, the troubled youth was categorized as potentially dangerous.

Lee was referred to Community Service Society for psychiatric treatment, but the organization was unable to help him, because of its full case load, and Lee needed intensive treatment that they couldn’t offer. Marguerite maintained that there was nothing wrong with her son. She claimed he was just a truant not needing any treatment. Marguerite had no love for authorities and quite frequently spoke back annoyingly.

In 1954, they moved back to New Orleans, and Lee attended school, where he was considered a loner and troublemaker, always in a fight. When tested for high school, he scored above average in vocabulary and reading. It was at this time, he began reading Karl Marx. Lee commented later that he became interested in Marxism after reading a pamphlet about Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, the executed communist spies. He claimed he “could see the impoverishment of the masses before my own eyes in my mother. I thought the worker’s life could be better.” In October 1956, he sent a letter to the Socialist Party of America (SPA), stating: “I am sixteen years of age and would like more information about your youth league [Y.P.S.I.]. I would like to know if there is a branch in my area, how to join, etc. I am a Marxist and have been studying socialist principles for well over fifteen months. I am very interested in your Y.P.S.I. Sincerely, Lee Oswald.” He filled out a SPA form, checking the box requesting further information, and forwarded it with the letter.

Marine Corps
Before his 16th birthday, Lee dropped out of high school
and made an effort to enlist in the Marines. He submitted a false affidavit signing his mother’s name, claiming he was 17. The Marines turned him down, being quite suspicious of the note and his age. He turned 16 on October 18, 1956, and on October 21st, he enlisted in the Marines, with his mother’s permission. He was following in his two older brother’s footsteps, because they had joined the military as well. Lee wanted to prove that he could be a Marine and show everyone his grit. He had a shell built around him already, from his social unacceptability. This was his refuge when in difficulty. He was a loner, a difficult personality, and fought to protect his self-respect. But, he could remain cool and reserved when harassed, which he did while being interrogated about the assassination.

In boot camp, recruit Lee Harvey Oswald had problems qualifying with a rifle, which brought ridicule from those in his company. This was an attack on his masculinity, but he eventually qualified as a Sharpshooter, which was the middle category of Marksmen, Sharpshooter, and Expert. [There are accounts that note he qualified only as a Marksman.]

After boot camp, he attended radar and air traffic controller schools in Jacksonville, FL and Biloxi, MI. He was friendly with two Marine classmates, Daniel Powers and Martin Schrand. They traveled together at times and were in the same radar unit, Marine Air Control, at Atsugi Airbase, 35 miles southwest of Tokyo. Once again because of his difficult personality, he was continuously harassed by other Marines in this unit as well. He didn’t socialize and remained on base, watching television, and for this they called him Mrs. Oswald. He wasn’t a clean person hygienically. Once his barracks’ mates forced him into the shower room, clothes and all. He rarely fought back, having the tendency to turn away, ignoring his harassers. He couldn’t play the male game of bantering, joking, and having fun, because he took everything seriously and was offended when teased, containing his rage inside.

Private First Class Oswald liked his work of identifying incoming aircraft on radar, determining if they were friendly or hostile. In radar school, he did well, placing seventh in a class of 34. His supervising officers at Atsugi liked his effort and filed no complaints against him. He was smart and skilled in what he did. He had a secret classification, because of the radar equipment and codes he used. He was known to sit erect, stiff-lipped, speaking quietly, much like a divinity student one suggested.

There was a serious problem though. Fellow Marines questioned his sexuality. He had feminine traits, and there were signs of homosexual behavior in his relationships and entertainment. The homosexual rumor remained with him throughout the Marines, with his mother’s permission. He was following in his two older brother’s footsteps, because they had joined the military as well. Lee wanted to prove that he could be a Marine and show everyone his grit. He had a shell built around him already, from his social unacceptability. This was his refuge when in difficulty. He was a loner, a difficult personality, and fought to protect his self-respect. But, he could remain cool and reserved when harassed, which he did while being interrogated about the assassination.

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Around midnight, while guarding the radar unit on Formosa, Oswald shot off several rounds from his M-1 rifle. His duty officer ran to Oswald, finding him slumped against a tree, crying, and shaking violently. He exclaimed there were men in the woods, he challenged them, and then fired his rifle where they were. He cried out over and over that he “couldn’t bear being on guard duty.” He was sent back to Atsugi immediately. One fellow Marine remarked that he was certain that Oswald faked the whole thing, wanting to return to Japan. He commented that “there was nothing dumb about Oswald.”

Because of this, Oswald was reassigned to a Marine Air Control unit near Santa Ana, California. Here, the excitement was gone from his work, because the aircraft on radar were always friendly. He tried a new tact. He began learning to speak, write, and read the Russian language. He took the Marine Corps proficiency exam but scored low. He studied in more earnest, subscribing to the Russian Language newspaper, People’s World, published by the Socialist Worker’s Party. Mailroom personnel on base reported to administrative officers that Oswald was receiving communist material, which was not a good thing for an American Marine to do. When asked by the operations officer the reason, Oswald replied that he was “trying to indoctrinate himself in Russian theory in conformance with Marine Corps policy.” Because he was not taken seriously by most, the matter was dropped. He joked with others in his radar unit that he was a Russian spy. He played Russian classical music on his phonograph and selected red chessman that he called the “Red Army.” For this, he was becoming known as “Oswaldfovich.”

**Castro’s Cuba**

One fellow Marine asked him why he didn’t go out in the evening. He replied that he was saving his money, because “one day he would do something which would make him famous.” It was believed that he was planning to travel to the Soviet Union after his discharge. Because of his unclean hygiene, he was removed from the radar unit’s barracks and placed in a smaller building, where he struck up a friendship with a Marine who was from Puerto Rico. He remarked that Oswald talked about Castro and Cuba, saying, “I’m going to fight for Castro in future battles now that Fidel had entered Havana.” His Puerto Rican friend was on leave in Puerto Rico when Castro took over Cuba. When he returned, Oswald joked with him, saying he didn’t go to Puerto Rico but to Cuba to help Castro. The Puerto Rican remarked that Oswald talked wildly about them becoming Cuban officers, who would “lead an expedition to some of the other islands and free them too.”

The Puerto Rican wondered how Oswald would get to Cuba, and once there, would he be accepted by the revolutionaries, because he was white? Oswald bought a Spanish dictionary and began learning to speak the language with his friend’s help. As American media became more critical of Castro, Oswald’s Puerto Rican friend turned away from the Cuban idea and concentrated more on his Marine career. He then drew away from Oswald and his revolutionary talk.

One of Oswald’s superior officers often played chess with Oswald, because he was an engaging player. The officer had attended the Foreign Service School and was knowledgeable of world affairs. Oswald asked questions, demonstrating to the officer that he was quite familiar with world politics and personalities. Oswald would sometimes talk to officers about world events and come away smug with the knowledge that he knew more. He said once to a friend that “if men like that are leading us, then there is something wrong.”

Oswald liked intellectual and political discussions with others. In a group of Marines, who were talking religion, he commented that he was an atheist, and “the best religion was communism.” He liked to shock listeners. Many times he tried to stir up trouble, especially to get an officer or a staff sergeant angry at him by making a wise remark. Oswald was known to say that communism was a rational approach to life, a scientific approach. He protected Marxist theory of history. He said that workers were exploited under capitalism, but in the Soviet system, money was spent for the benefit of the people. If challenged about Soviet life, he would get angry and say “How do you know?” One Marine stated that Oswald was not militant or a revolutionary. It would be entirely appropriate for him to live in the Soviet Union just out of curiosity.

It was speculated by some that Oswald sold radar codes in his Asian deployment. He seemed to have too much money for an enlisted man. This was true in California as well. Someone noticed that Oswald collected photographs of U.S. military aircraft that were visual aides in training classes. One time his Puerto Rican friend took a bag filled with them for Oswald to the Los Angeles bus station and placed it in a locker, giving the key to Oswald. When it came time for him to travel to Soviet Union, he seemed to have enough money for the odyssey, adding to suspicions.

**Defects to Soviet Union**

Oswald desperately wanted out of the Marines, and when the opportunity arose he took it. He sought a hardship discharge based on his mother Marguerite’s incapacitating injury at work, when an object fell and injured her. She filed for disability, causing Oswald to seek a hardship discharge to care for her. He instructed her in the process, with her contacting the Marines with her case, asking for her son’s discharge to help her. It worked, and in September 1959, Oswald received a hardship discharge. Once a free man, he stopped at Fort Worth just long enough to notify his mother that he was in the import-export business and would be leaving for Europe. He stored his belongings in her apartment, gave her $100, and booked a passage on a ship from New Orleans to LeHavre. He arrived in LeHavre on October 8, 1959, with a visa in hand. He traveled by train to Moscow, arriving October 16th.

When the Marines received word in December 1959 that Oswald had defected to Soviet Union, it caused quite a stir. Marine Lieutenant John E. Donovan, who was in Oswald’s unit, commented, “That compromised all our secret radio frequencies, call signs, and authentication codes. He knew the location of every unit on the West Coast and the radar capability of every installation. We had to spend thousands of man hours changing everything.” With that done, the secret information that Oswald possessed was worthless to the Soviets. A fellow Marine wrote in an affidavit that Oswald once “claimed to be named after General Robert E. Lee, whom he characterized to be the greatest man in history.” But, the Marine
commented that both Lees were traitors to their country. Oswald’s defection was difficult for the Marines to swallow, because American Marines don’t defect, they fight loyally and gloriously for their country.

While in the Soviet Union, Oswald kept a diary, which he began on October 16, 1959 when he arrived in Moscow and ended on March 27, 1962, when he received permission to return to the U.S. He entitled it “Historic Diary,” which suggested self-importance and the fantasy that he would assume greatness. One of his first diary entries was to note his exhilaration over the media attention he received for his defection and renouncing U.S. citizenship.

Oswald arrived in Moscow on October 16, 1963 and was assigned an apartment for 60 rubles a month. He praised the grand view he had from his apartment’s balcony, overlooking the river.

At the factory, a fellow worker confided in him, telling Oswald to return to the U.S. and explained what was wrong with the Soviet Union. He wrote in his diary, “I begin to feel uneasy inside. It’s true [what he says]!” A few months later Oswald reached the point where his disillusionment with the Soviet Union was complete. He wrote, “As my Russian improves, I become increasingly conscious of just what sort of society I live in. There are mass gymnastics, compulsory after work meetings, usually political information meeting, compulsory attendance at lectures, and the sending of the entire shop collective (except me) to pick potatoes on a Sunday at a state collective farm.”

He wrote that he fell in love with a Jewish woman and asked her to marry him. But she wasn’t interested, because he was an American and might be arrested and taken away. On January 4, 1961, Soviet officials asked Oswald if he still wanted Soviet citizenship. He told them he wanted an extension of his residential visa. He wrote, “I am starting to reconsider my desire about staying. The work is drab. The money I get has nowhere to be spent. No nightclubs or bowling alleys, no places of recreation except the trade union dances.” On February 1, 1961, he corresponded with the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, declaring, “I would like to go back to the U.S.”

Marina

He attended a trade union dance on May 17, 1961 and meets Marina. They later marry, and she becomes pregnant. She agreed to go with him to the U.S., prompting him to request visas, which were granted in late December 1961. Their baby daughter, June, was born, and they depart for the U.S. in June 1962, first living in Fort Worth and then next in Dallas. They became acquainted with a number of Russian-speaking people. They meet Ruth Paine, who spoke Russian, and at the time was living with her husband and their children.

Oswald worked at various jobs, but both work and marriage were not satisfying to the politically-minded Marxist revolutionary. His enjoyment came from discussions and political activity. He sent correspondence to the Communist Party U.S.A. (CPUSA) and the Socialist Workers’ Party. Oswald tried to assassinate former Major General Walker at his Dallas residence, but his rifle shot missed. Walker was renowned inflammatory right wing activist. Oswald, Marina, and their daughter move to New Orleans, where he worked in a succession of low-paying jobs.

He had been disappointed with the Soviet Union’s brand of communism, with its drudgery, impoverishment, dreariness, and lack of goods and services. He felt that the Soviet’s application of Marxism wasn’t creative or inspirational. The excitement of being a revolutionary attracted him far more. His interest concerning Castro and socialist Cuba became more enticing. He harbored thoughts of going to the island, being welcomed as a Marxist intellectual, and playing a major role in the Castro regime. But first Cuba needed to know about him and his desire to go to Cuba. During the summer 1963, he decided to open a New Orleans chapter of Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC), a pro-Castro organization, to get media attention.
Fair Play for Cuba

Even though FPCC headquarters in New York City did not encourage his quest, he printed at his own cost “Hands off Cuba” literature and began distributing the leaflets in front of the International Trade Mart in New Orleans. He carried a placard as well, all which attracted anti-Castro Cubans living in New Orleans. They had lost loved ones and their country because of Castro. Oswald stirred up a hornet’s nest, being accosted immediately by very angry anti-Castro activists. There was a fight and arrests, which appeared on local television. He was interviewed on television shortly after and then participated in a television debate with the leader of the anti-Castro Cubans, Carlos Bringuier. Oswald wrote V.T. Lee, National Director of FPCC and also to CPUSA, asking for advice on what he should do next. FPCC wouldn’t sponsor a chapter in New Orleans, because it didn’t want to cause trouble. The CPUSA didn’t want any publicity either, with headquarters replying to Oswald, “Often it is advisable for some people to remain in the background.” Oswald didn’t listen and continued on his quest to travel to Cuba.

Ruth Paine visited them in New Orleans in September 1963, and because Marina was pregnant with Oswald’s second child, due in October, it was decided that Marina and their daughter would live with Paine in Irving, a suburb of Dallas. It was the only thing that could be done, because Oswald was a poor provider. Marina was young, would soon have a second child, spoke very little English, and had no American work skills.

Oswald now had a chance to travel to Cuba, and to this, he needed to visit the Cuban and Soviet embassies in Mexico City. The Mexican consulate in New Orleans provided him with a “tourist card” on September 17th. Marina left on September 23rd, with Oswald departing by bus on September 25th to Mexico City, with stops in Houston and Laredo. He registered at a cheap hotel in Mexico City and contacted the Cuban Embassy for an “in-transit visa.” He told the Cuban officials that he planned to stop in Cuba on his way to the Soviet Union. They remarked that he needed a Soviet Union visa first. Oswald walked to the Soviet Embassy and explained his needs. They were suspicious of Oswald, telling him to fill out forms and wait for a response from Moscow, which could take several months. This angered Oswald, who thought he would be treated warmly by his communist comrades, when he displayed news clippings of his FPCC activity in New Orleans. They weren’t impressed, with him leaving in a huff.

He returned to the U.S. on October 3rd, visiting Marina, telling of his frustrations and disappointments in Mexico City. He wrote to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., complaining about his treatment at the embassies, calling it “a gross breach of regulations.” It had been in Oswald’s mind that he would get the Cuban and Soviet visas, travel to Cuba and persuade them of his usefulness to the revolution. If he was successful, Cuba might grant him a long-term visa. If he failed, then he would continue to the Soviet Union. Wherever he was accepted, Cuba or Soviet Union, he would send for Marina and their children to come and live with him. But as it stood at the moment, Oswald was alienated by the U.S., the Soviet Union, and Cuba. He was troubled, unhappy, and most of all unstable, unpredictable, and very dangerous and exceedingly so with weapons.

Warren Commission

The Warren Commission Report concluded that there were many factors that caused Oswald to assassinate the President:

“It was apparent that Oswald was moved by an overriding hostility to his environment. He does not appear to have been able to establish meaningful relationships with other people. He was perpetually discontented with the world around him. Long before the assassination, he expressed his hatred for American society and acted in protest against it. Oswald’s search for what he conceived to be the perfect society was doomed from the start. He sought for himself a place in history—a role as the ‘great man’ who would be recognized as having been in advance of his times. His commitment to Marxism and communism appears to have been another important factor in his motivation. He also had demonstrated a capacity to act decisively and without regard to the consequences when such action would further his aims of the moment. Out of these and many other factors which may have molded the character of Lee Harvey Oswald, there emerged a man capable of assassinating President Kennedy.”

CIA

Some suggested that Oswald worked for the CIA, but with his instability and checkered past, it would seem certain that the CIA would not have selected or encouraged him for any assignment. Being an avid reader of newspapers, Oswald knew the CIA and the Kennedy administration were out to destroy Castro. A case in point was the syndicated news article that appeared in New Orleans newspapers just before he left for Mexico City. The article reported that Castro threatened to retaliate against American leaders if they didn’t cease assassination attempts against him and Cuban officials. Castro was Oswald’s hero and Kennedy’s people wanted his hero dead. In his deluded mind, he thought that by killing Kennedy, he would become a Cuban hero!

In 1975, former CIA Director, John McCone, remarked that Robert Kennedy was aware of the plans to assassinate Castro. Bobby was deeply troubled by his brother’s assassination beyond human grief. McCone commented that Bobby had a sense of guilt that in some way he was indirectly responsible for the murder. How closely connected Bobby was with the plans to assassinate Castro is not specifically known, but it is thought to be near enough. Bobby was asked by Earl Warren in June 1964, if he had any information suggesting that there had been “a domestic or foreign conspiracy?” It took Bobby four months to reply, with some thinking that he debated about disclosing Kennedy administration plans concerning Castro. He finally replied writing that he knew of none. When President Johnson was informed of the Kennedy administration’s plots, he was said to have exclaimed, “They were running a Murder, Inc.!”

Juanita Castro

On November 22, 1964, a year after the assassination, the 31 year-old Juanita Castro Ruiz, sister of Fidel, addressed a conference of the International Radio and Television Society members in New York City. Juanita had defected to the U.S. in June
1964. She told the assembly that Fidel was indirectly responsible for Kennedy’s assassination. She noted that her brother constantly condemned Kennedy in his radio speeches, calling Kennedy every name in the book, such as, “the illiterate millionaire,” “murderer,” and other infamous phrases. She remarked that Oswald was a militant person, who idolized Fidel, and Oswald knew of the hatred toward Fidel in the U.S. Because of this and feelings of alienation from America, he struck to afflict massive damage.

It was thought that after the assassination, Oswald planned to flee to Cuba through Mexico. He in fact told a fellow Marine, Nelson Delgado, that if he “were ever trying to escape U.S. authorities, he would go to Mexico and from there to Russia via Cuba.”

**Never Brothered Anyone**

On October 14, 1963, with a satchel and a few clothes, Oswald rented a room for $8 a week from Mr. and Mrs. A.C. Johnson in Dallas on North Beckley Street. The housekeeper at the rooming house, Earlene Roberts, commented that “I told myself that he was a peculiar man. I took it for granted that he didn’t care for people. But he never bothered anyone.” Another person living there noted that “I didn’t know him by name. Everybody left him alone.”

A newspaper interviewer summed up Marguerite’s disposition when public attention disappeared:

“She made the awful discovery that comes to all who get caught in the bright glare of public attention. The light shines all too briefly and gives little warmth and then quickly, coldly, the crowds are gone, the questioners vanish and all that is left is a shade drawn room, empty and echoing the sobs of dreadful loneliness. Her wail was encapsulated in her cry: ‘I’m the mother of accused assassin and people don’t care about me.’”

**Marina**

There was another lonely person left by Oswald, his Soviet wife Marina. She had two infant daughters, was untrained in American work skills, and spoke very little English. Some thought she might be a Soviet spy or used Oswald to spy on the U.S. But such theories were vastly untrue. She simply wanted a husband and a family, and especially a husband who provided. She spoke angrily to him about his Marxist fantasies, his militant behavior, and his ridiculous weapons.

Marina had a tough life even before Oswald. She was born in Leningrad in 1941 as Marina Nicolaevna Prusakove, spending most of her life in the city. Her father was killed during World War II, with her mother remarrying, and dying in 1957, when Marina was 16. Her mother’s brother, Ilya Prusakov, a bookkeeper, who lived in Minsk, was able to find her a job at the Third Clinical Hospital as a chemist. It was in Minsk where Marina met and married Oswald. Her Uncle Ilya disowned her, saying, “We have nothing in common.” After the assassination, Ilya became concerned for Marina and her two daughters. He was known to buy any publication that had information on them. Marina remarried in 1965, having two sons and living in Dallas for many years. She appeared in numerous television documentaries concerning the Kennedy assassination. In 1989, she became a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Written by Robert LeRoy Santos

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**State Theater employee, Jim Duff, places lettering in the marquee alerting Modestans that there were no movies Friday night**

*Modesto Bee photo*

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**Kennedy sitting in his U.S. Navy torpedo boat PT 109 in 1943. A movie was made about his heroics of saving 10 crewmen and being rescued in the Solomon Islands. He received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and Purple Heart**

*Kennedy Library photo*