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Journalists' memories of Nov. 22, '63

The Dallas Morning News - Sunday, September 5, 1993**Author:** *John Anders*

As media folks around town prepare for an upcoming SMU seminar, stirring their memories of that unforgettable November day in 1963, I talked to a few around town who covered the assassination and briefly probed their recollections.

Ann Atterberry, who works on The Dallas Morning News' library staff, was probably closest to the president when he was shot.

"Four of us from the old Women's News department had gone over and taken our lunches to where the parade ended near the triple underpass. We sat down in front of Mr. (Abraham) Zaprunder. Suddenly the whole place erupted in chaos. The youngest member of our group, Mary Elizabeth Ann Woodward, saw Kennedy hit, but he was already slumped down when I saw him. We halfway had to carry Mary Elizabeth back to the newspaper, she was so upset.

"I phoned in an eyewitness account to my hometown newspaper in Jackson, Miss., and reported that I heard three gunshots. I guess that's why no conspiracy theorists have bothered me over the years.

"Mary Elizabeth was so troubled by what she'd seen that she went off and joined the Peace Corps. A psychiatrist tried to keep her out by telling her she was joining out of guilt for what had happened in Dallas. I've always believed he was right."

Famous film

Channel 8 assignments editor Bert Shipp was a cameraman for WFAA-TV in those days. He remembers the FBI bringing the Zaprunder film into the WFAA studios and demanding that it be developed there. "I told them they'd have to take this 8mm film to Kodak if they wanted it developed. None of us knew what they had."

Bert was at the Trade Mart waiting for Kennedy and sped to Parkland Memorial Hospital with the motorcade. "At first we thought the president had been hit with a rock or an egg, but at Parkland I looked into the limousine and saw the blood and the roses. I tried to get a phone from Merriman Smith (of United Press International), and he told me if I touched that phone, I'd have to eat it for breakfast.

"We were all trying to find out the president's condition, and I ran into (Sheriff) Bill Decker. He said, 'Bert, have you ever seen a deer hit in the back of the head?'

"I called in and said, 'You can put it on the air that Kennedy is dead.' Eddie Barker said he was the first; I said I was pretty close to the first. Maybe at this reunion, we'll all put a quarter in the pot and see who wins."

Mr. Barker was anchorman and news director of KRLD-TV (now KDFW). Today he is president of Eddie Barker and Associates.

Major scoop

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"I pretty much get credit for coming on the air first," says Mr. Barker. "This doctor from Parkland came up to me at the Trade Mart and whispered, 'Eddie, he's dead.'

"I went on the air live with it, and Dan Rather, who was standing there next to me, called New York and phoned in the same news."

Mr. Barker is remembered for kicking Dan Rather out of the KRLD newsroom when Mr. Rather came in and tried to commandeer the CBS affiliate's facilities.

Veteran author and newsman Hugh Aynesworth stood in the middle of Elm Street and "could have hit Oswald with a rock" on that day. He also heard only three shots ring out.

Representing The Dallas Morning News, Mr. Aynesworth was soon part of the contingent chasing Lee Harvey Oswald along Jefferson Boulevard in Oak Cliff, before the accused assassin was cornered in the Texas Theater after killing a police officer.

"Five minutes before he turned up in the theater, the cops ran into an old furniture store and chased a guy into the attic," says Mr. Aynesworth.

"Suddenly the man fell halfway through the ceiling. All sorts of debris fell on us, and we looked up to see just the man's legs sticking out. Everybody in the place had a drawn gun except me, and I was scared to death. Then it turned Please see ANDERS on Page 12F.

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out the guy was just an assistant DA. It was both comical and scary."

Jim Ewell, then a Morning News reporter, watched from the balcony as Oswald was swarmed and arrested.

"From up there, looking down, it looked like a football huddle. All the kids watching the movie ran for the exits, and one kid got trampled. I saw the kid later, and he had footprints all over him," says Mr. Ewell, who is now public information officer for the Dallas County Sheriff's Department.

Mr. Ewell had begged his editor to send a photographer, but no one then had made the connection between the killing of a president and the shooting of a police officer in Oak Cliff. "I ran to a pay phone at the Cabell's Minit Market to phone the news desk. My editor wanted to know what the hell I was doing in Oak Cliff when everything was happening downtown."

Mr. Ewell had arrived at the Texas Theater in a police vehicle driven by a department captain. "We did that in those days," he says.

He had to flag down a man in a pickup truck on Jefferson to take him back to The News; the police car in which Mr. Ewell had arrived took Oswald to jail.

The Nov. 20 seminar hosted by Southern Methodist University will be a daylong yarn-swapping recollection of what the local media saw and experienced during the assassination and its aftermath.

The program, "Reporters Remember: 11-22-63," will play before high school and college journalists and the public. It will be videotaped as a sort of oral history project.

The format, to be organized by SMU journalism professor Darwin Payne, is taking shape. Groups interested in attending can drop an inquiry to P.O. Box 191229, Dallas 75219.

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