

Opinion: Recalling the day Kennedy died

By Bob Schieffer, AARP

I was a footnote of sorts to the awful events of that weekend in 1963 when John Kennedy died in Dallas.

In those days, I was the night police reporter on my hometown newspaper, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. President Kennedy had made a breakfast speech in Fort Worth before going to Dallas on that fateful day.

When we got word he had been shot, I raced to the office and, as I pulled into the Star-Telegram parking lot, the bulletin came over the radio: The president was dead.



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There was total bedlam in the newsroom. Every phone was ringing. I grabbed one. A woman caller asked, “Is there anyone there who can give me a ride to Dallas?”

“Lady,” I said, “we’re not running a taxi service. And besides, the president has been shot!”

“Yes,” the woman said. “I heard on the radio that my son is the one they arrested.”

It was Lee Harvey Oswald’s mother.

I jotted down her address and told her I would be there shortly to take her to Dallas. The paper's automobile editor, Bill Foster, was test-driving a Cadillac that week, so I commandeered Bill and his sedan and drove to the address on the west side of Fort Worth that Mrs. Oswald had given us. She was standing on the curb, and we drove her to the Dallas police station. I sat in the back with her; Bill drove, and I interviewed her along the way.

In those days, we never told people who we were unless they asked. Since I always wore a snap-brim hat, the Dallas cops assumed I was a young detective. At the station, I just approached the first policeman I saw and said, "I'm the one who brought Oswald's mother over from Fort Worth." The officer took us to a room in the burglary-squad office. After a while, Mrs. Oswald asked me if they would let her see her son, so I approached the chief of homicide and asked.

Things were much more informal in those days, but I was still stunned when he said, "We should probably do that," and we were ushered into a holding room off the jail.

I was on the verge of the biggest story of my life – a chance to question the man who was charged with killing a president.

It was not to be. After six hours in the police station, an FBI agent finally did what someone should have done when I arrived: He asked who I was. He was not amused to discover I was a reporter. He told me to leave immediately, seemed in a mood to kill me and said something to that effect.

I never got that scoop. But I had gotten the first interview with Oswald's mother, my story was picked up by both *Time* and *Newsweek*, and for the next two days I covered the awful story that left the nation in shock and altered America forever.

Read the whole story