

# Monday's Commentary

## Remembering Dallas: City tagged with tragedy

### Shirlee's sallies



by Shirlee Iden

Mostly nightmares are individual traumas that wake us up in the middle of the night in a sweat.

But 16 years ago, those of us who are old enough to remember, lived through a collective nightmare — the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

It was on a brisk November Friday and for a long time afterward, people would ask: "Where were you when you heard?"

Perhaps the reason I remember so clearly how I heard the president had been shot is that my daughter, Linda, told me.

Linda was 13. Though she should have been in school with those young teens, she was home bedridden with a neurological ailment that would take her life in another year.

She watched television a great deal since she could not walk or sit erect.

That morning I had taken her pup, Coco, a curly-haired poodle, to Northland to be groomed. While waiting for Coco to get her haircut, I stopped at an aunt's house to visit.

Knowing I was there, Linda called at just about the noon hour.

"Mommie, the president was shot," she said, excitedly. She told me she had heard it on an news flash.

IMMEDIATELY, we turned on both the radio and television and sat stunned as Linda's revelation was confirmed.

Within the hour came the grim announcement that the young president was dead.

The term "media event" probably hadn't become common usage in 1963, but that's what it was. An entire nation watched, stunned, as the president's body was put on a plane, as a courageous first lady became the "first widow" and a new president took the oath when a Bible could be found.

We saw the funeral procession, master-minded by Jacqueline Kennedy with its prancing horses, and somber heads of state. And we all cried when little John-John Kennedy saluted his father smartly.

The agony of assassination seemed to continue with the dramatic events in Dallas. The killing of a

police officer, the arrest of Lee Harvey Oswald and his bizarre murder by Jack Ruby.

It all gave Dallas somewhat of an aura of a violent, nightmarish town. And many thought if only the president had not gone there, the bloodletting could have been avoided.

NEVER HAVING been in Dallas before, I thought surely I would never want to go there.

The first time I ever went to Texas was to a convention in Houston. And when it was over, I learned at the airport that the plane taking me home would stop in Dallas.

My stomach did a flip-flop. I didn't want to be there. It was eight years since Camelot had ended with gunshots, but I didn't want to be in Dallas.

Never had I mastered the art of sleeping on an

airplane. But there were psychological forces at work that day. I got on the plane and woke up more than an hour later to be told we had landed in Dallas and taken off after a brief stop.

Strangely, it comforted me to think I really hadn't been there.

Camelot and the assassination too, have faded in our consciousness. Now we are reminded again as another Kennedy seeks the presidency and unstable minds focus again on a Kennedy brother.

I've been back to Houston on that busy weekend when I covered the huge Women's Year Conference. And again the plane stopped in Dallas. But this time, it didn't seem to matter.

Maybe I've forgiven the city, somehow, for the pain inflicted there. But as I write this, I look forward to taking a plane ride to Dallas again, and getting off the plane this time.

My husband Jack and I will spend three days... there. He's most excited about being with me when I accept a writing award.

But beyond that deep satisfaction of being a winner again, my training as a reporter, my studies as a historian and my deep interest in politics are going to compel me to visit the Book Depository and the grassy knoll and examine all the bizarre memorabilia of the day when Dallas meant nightmare.

## Friends are just wild about good old Harry



### "Around the edge"

by Jackie Klein

"Ladies and gentlemen of the Boulevards of Paris cafe — introducing that stellar singer of the songs you love — Mr. Harry Harris."

Jack Teagarden signaled the band in that St. Paul, Minn. prohibition-days night spot. In bounded Harris, a bell-toned performer, with "Mammy." Pretty soon it would be "My Melancholy Baby," "Mexicali Rose," or "When I Lost You."

I wasn't around to meet Harris in that night club where the customers included gangsters or the lam from Chicago's underworld and other parts of the country gone temporarily hot in 1932. But I had the pleasure of meeting him a few years ago when he was appearing at the 20 Carat Club in the Detroit area which, I believe, has since burned down.

A couple of things made me start thinking of Harris lately. The 80ish-year-old singer was very fond of my dad who loved to dance and frequently patronized the 20 Carat Club. Sometimes I went along and took notes of Harris's nostalgic conversations with us. I saved those notes, thinking that someday I'd write a story about the singer.

Digging through some old mail last week I came across a Christmas card from Harris addressed to me and my father. Harris is living in Florida now with a new young wife and didn't know my dad had died about a month before Christmas.

THROUGH MIND'S association, I compared Harris with Eddie Edgar who's in his 80s and still going strong, writ-

ing for Observer & Eccentric 's newspapers. Edgar, a former sports writer who now authors a column called "The Stroller," loves to tell stories about by-gone days and so does Harris who's still performing. They don't hardly make that kind anymore.

Harris, who has a host of fans, once reminisced about the night before he opened at the Boulevards of Paris Cafe. He went to the club to look it over and was invited into a private room to sing a couple of songs for \$100.

"So there were four couples, the guys in tuxes and the women in ermine, real high class," Harris recalled. "I sang and sang until one of the guys suggested moving on to another spot. They paid me. It was 4 in the morning."

"I had my car, a Nash 400, and offered to drive one of the guys and the club had check girl home. A car with no lights crept behind us. The streets were empty. The car came beside me and forced me to the curb. All of a sudden, the guy in my car fired his .38 smack across the hat

check girl and me. The fellows in the other car fired back.

"I slammed into the curb and ducked down. The hat check girl was yelling and guns were going. I crawled out, got away and ran like anything in the rain. I slipped a couple of times before I saw a stretcher and jumped on. My luck, there was a cop riding on the stretcher. He saw me looking dirty, breathing hard and acting excited. He took me to the station house."

HARRIS SAID he couldn't remember the description of anyone or anything except his own car. He didn't know anybody, he said, and all of a sudden he was caught in a lot of crossfire. The guy he was driving turned out to be Frank Wash, an ex-con who later was killed in a Kansas City gang massacre.

Harris recalled strolling down Broadway in New York in 1924 and stopping in at the Nightingale Cafe on 48th Street. He was asked to sing a few songs with the orchestra. The piano player was Jimmy Durante and Harris was

hired. Eddie Jackson was there too.

The headwaiter at the cafe convinced Harris, Durante and Jackson to open their own club. They put up \$500 and moved in to a place on 58th Street off Broadway.

"We flipped a coin to see who'd have the club named after him and Durante won," Harris recalled. "We had a good sized sign that cost \$50 a letter. We were so close for cash that we couldn't afford the last 'E.' We saved the \$50 and that's why the place was always called Club Durant."

Five months later, Harris sold his part of the club for \$3,500. He was paid in cash as he was for singing, business and everything else. Nobody in those days wanted a signature on anything or a record of it.

THE NIGHT before the 1929 St. Valentine's Day gangster massacre in Chicago, Harris was hired to sing for what turned out to be several of the intended victims.

"It was Bugs Moran's party," Harris remembered. I sang 'O Solo Mio' for Joe, 'My Yiddish Mamma' for Jack, 'Willie the Weeper' for another guy and Irish songs for Bugs. Every guy but one was murdered the next day. That guy wasn't in the garage when the machine gun went off."

For all I know, Harris, an ebullient octogenarian, is still performing in clubs. He used to keep a home in Detroit before his wife died. They were married 47 years.

I may never see him again, but I can still hear Harris singing "Mammy." A lot of people are wild about Harry, including me.

## Readers' forum

### Reader says low income housing is the main issue in Hills

Editor:

For the better part of this year, the editors of the Observer have a lot of words praising the city council for its stand on senior citizen housing in Farmington Hills and sarcastically denounced the public for opposing this issue.

You have failed repeatedly to write our point of view. We don't oppose senior citizen housing, we oppose HUD (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development)-imposed low-income housing.

The only feasible reason for you to

continually mislabel this issue is to arouse the emotions of the people.

Instead of painting the citizens of Farmington Hills as an hysterical, heartless mob, why don't you get to the source of the problem, which is HUD?

This dictatorial arm of the U.S. government is the real culprit in denying subsidized housing to senior citizens. HUD has attached all the strings, making the elderly throughout the country bear the burden of housing for low-income and welfare families.

Our elected representatives are just as responsible by permitting HUD to

continue its discriminatory rules. If you, the editors, were truly concerned

about this matter, you would mount a campaign to get these rules changed, instead of wasting your energy harassing the voters.

The public is sick of government intervention in our lives that leaves us no recourse. We cannot vote the HUD officials out of office. And when the city council took away our chance to vote on this issue, we had to fight against it.

The fact that senior citizens are smack in the middle of no-man's land is sad, indeed, but just remember who put

them there.

Having attended some of the meetings concerning this problem, I am continually amazed at how both the city and developer have been less than honest in offering the facts to the public.

Why can't they say exactly what the HUD rules are, and how these rules will affect our situation? The people should not be forced to drag every bit of information out of these people.

And you, the editors of this paper, are no better.

When have you taken the time and trouble to inform your readers of all

the ramifications of a HUD-sponsored project?

No, the people of Farmington Hills are not to be browbeaten for taking an active part in shaping their community. The community leaders are the ones who have failed. It's just a dirty shame that the elderly have become such shabbily treated political pawns.

JEAN-DEMBECK, Farmington Hills

Editor's note: The present senior citi-

zen low-income housing project presently under consideration for construction in Farmington Hills is to be financed by bonds sold through the Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA). The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has nothing to say about the regulations concerning the project.

This newspaper has stated that fact several times. The senior citizens and low-income families' rents will be subsidized through HUD.

### Editor is rapped for 'waffling' inconsistencies

Editor:

It is difficult to be amused with Steve Barnaby and his Sept. 24 commentary.

One week he allows his newspaper to be used by those who say, "The city council think they know best, let the people speak." Then Mr. Barnaby uses the same newspaper to blast the council for doing just that — no, senior and family housing doesn't need more study. It needs doing. If by putting it on the ballot, however, it will focus the issue and educate the citizens with honest information then it has value.

Where, one has to wonder, was this crusading newsman when three candidates were making incredible statements like Farmington Hills resident of ten months Mr. Lange says that he would never vote his conscience?

Mr. Lange hasn't been here long enough to know questions, let alone answers.

What about Mr. Wolf suggesting the expansion of the Farmington Hills Chores Service? Is he unaware that this program receives its funding from the federal government?

And now "me too" candidate, Jack Burwell, who apparently has no problem raising taxes astronomically

rather than accept any more of the considerable federal funds already in the city budget or attempting to get more for housing needs.

Maybe Mr. Burwell would rather cut services like police, fire, and education and not raise taxes. Who knows what he really thinks about anything?

It has been suggested by at least one of these candidates that community de-

velopment funds be used and senior citizens should apply individually for Section 8 rent subsidy.

The least anyone is guilty of, who would say is uninformative. The 1990 allocation for individual Section 8 coupons for seniors for all of Oakland County is 40 to 50. Farmington Hills would be fortunate to get three of these. Not much of a substitute solution

I believe Mrs. Smith's derogatory remarks about other candidates and the voters of Farmington Hills are uncalled for and out of place.

Your paper is read in many communities outside of Farmington Hills and this kind of name-calling tactic will just give our city a bad name.

With this one exception, I believe all the current election campaigns have been run fairly and factually by all the other candidates; and because of the way they have handled their campaigns, I can sincerely say I am proud to be a voter in Farmington Hills.

LAWRENCE DUPONT, Farmington Hills

to our critical problem of senior housing.

If Barnaby attends the Waftle dinner and behaves with typical appropriateness and taste, he will likely ask for chopped pickle instead of syrup.

It might be a good waftle dinner if Willoughby can get some recipes from Barnaby, who seems to be somewhat of an expert on waftling, himself.

NANCY BATES, Farmington Hills

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Philip H. Power, Chairman of the Board

Richard D. Agninin, President, Chief Executive Officer

### Parent questions policy

Editor:

While reading the Farmington Observer about the large grant Farmington High received to help drop out students, I wondered WHY the administrators didn't review their policies as to WHY they could not keep the students in class in the first place.

My daughter transferred to Farmington High last year from Fordson in 12th grade. She told me many times that many students did not even show up for class that day. They were not asked for a re-admit from the teacher, to get back into class the next day.

who cares whether they got a '0'?

It seems to me if someone took more time to call parents or require a call to get them back to class the next day these students would be there.

Fordson High (Dearborn) tried treating these young people as adults one year and did not require parents to call. It turned out to be a disaster. Many children had to take summer classes to make up the time they missed in order to meet the graduation requirements.

MONICA RAIS, Farmington

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**Farmington Observer**  
*"Successor of the Farmington Enterprise"*

Steve Barnaby  
Editor  
22770 West Nine Mile  
Southfield MI 48075  
(313) 352-5400

John Reddy, General Mgr.  
Thomas A. Riccio, Executive Editor  
George J. Hagan, Advertising Director, Fred J. Wright, Circulation Director