Reflections on the day of President Kennedy’s Assassination on November 22, 1963 in Dallas, TX

• I was in Sister Mary Colman’s Spanish class on the second floor of Assumption Hall at Gwynedd-Mercy College. Sister Marie Denise brought a radio to our classroom. Afterwards we went to the chapel in Bryne Hall to pray for the president and the country. – Sister Dorothy Zeiser, RSM

• I was at work in a doctor’s office when my sister called in tears to tell me that President Kennedy had been shot. After consoling her, we turned on the office radio and listened to the somber news. When Walter Cronkite made that heart-wrenching announcement, everyone fell silent - there were a few tears, but mostly just stunned silence as each of us struggled to process the enormity of the loss. – Patricia Reardon, Mercy Associate

• I was sitting in the tiered lecture room in the science lab at College Misericordia in Dallas, PA. The president of the college was Mercy sister Mother Celestine. When the announcement came over the loud speaker that the president was shot in Dallas, someone cried out: “Who would want to shoot Mother Celestine????” – Sister Kathleen Masterson, RSM

• On that horrible day, as I was preparing the students at St. Patrick’s in Brooklyn to pack up for afternoon dismissal, the principal—Sister Mary Teresa—came over the PA system to inform us that the president had been shot, and to hold the children in the classroom. About 20 minutes later, we were asked to dismiss the students in silence. Even though these were only third graders, they and the entire student body left in silence! For the next three days, all of us young sisters went about our regular jobs and went to watch the TV in the community room as much as we could. – Sister Mary Jareth McElhinney, RSM

• After just two months as a postulant, I went early to chapel for 3 o’clock prayer. As I entered, only Sr. Mary Clementina in her wheelchair was there. She beckoned me, and with tears in her eyes whispered, “They shot the President.” – Sister Renee Yann, RSM

• I was a sophomore in college living in Florence, Italy, at Gonzaga University’s first year abroad program. We found out around 5 p.m., but because we were unable to speak Italian yet, we had to wait until midnight to hear a broadcast in English from the military bases in Germany. So from 5 p.m. until midnight we had no
information except "assassination," an ugly word scaring us into thinking our country might be in chaos. – Patricia Snead, Mercy Associate

- I was a college freshman sitting in Theology class at the College of St. Mary of the Springs in Columbus, OH. The librarian, Sr. Joseph Damien, OP, knocked on the door and told our professor, Father James Thuline, OP, that the President had been shot. We didn’t realize how serious it was until she returned within 30 minutes to tell us the President had died. Classes all over campus just stopped; we returned to our dorm and stayed glued to TVs until after the funeral. Prior to 9/11, it was my most powerful experience of national/communal grief. – Sister Dr. Julia Upton, RSM

- I was an 8th grade student at St. Joseph School, Sea Isle City, N.J. My teacher was Sister Andrew Mary, RSM (Sister Kathleen Duffy, RSM). I can remember Sister Kathleen walking over to the front door of the classroom, then returning to teach (we thought). We were told, “We are now going to pray for President Kennedy, who was shot,” (not a sound in the room) and in a short time, “prayers for President Kennedy who died.” Tears began, continued at dismissal, and all the way home! – Sister Mary Beth Geraghty, RSM

- As a student teacher at Haddonfield High School, I had just returned from my last class when I learned that President Kennedy had been assassinated. As I walked down the busiest street in Haddonfield, I felt a strange eeriness and silence as I boarded the bus for home. When I arrived at school the following week and saw the flag flying at half staff, I felt total despair of what was and what would never be again. – Sister Katherine Mroz, RSM

- I was a sister in the Religious Teachers of St. Lucy Filipppini Community, teaching 4th grade in St. Joseph’s School in East Orange, NJ. We had TVs in the classroom for educational purposes. On that day, my class of 64 children and I were watching the president on TV and witnessed his being shot right before our eyes. This was a very traumatic experience for all of us. I will never forget it! – Sister Brenda E. Rowe, RSM

- I was in my first years teaching at Red Bank Catholic High School in NJ and it was my birthday, which we did not observe in those days. However, a military band was coming to play in the grade school and I was excited to celebrate the day. Then news arrived at school that the president had been shot. It was not believable at first, but as we gathered in the community room to watch TV, it became that shocking sad reality. – Sister Marie Cook, RSM

- As a high school junior, I remember the startling, tragic news being announced over the intercom to the entire school. A silence like none other fell over the classroom, followed by loud painful sobs coming from all directions, as life as we knew it was changed forever. I ran home quickly after school to check on my mother, and this German, non-emotional woman was riveted to our small TV
screen, crying inconsolably. That scene spoke volumes to me of the impact JFK had on every single person in our nation. – Kathy Schiro, Mercy Associate

- It was 1:30 after dinner. I was taking care of a Sister in the infirmary. She had the radio on. We heard the news and couldn't believe the news. – Sister Mary Providence, RSM

- When I heard about the death of President Kennedy, I was in my room studying. I had begun graduate studies at St. Louis University in August, 1963 and lived in the House of Studies with about 40 other Sisters of Mercy. We spent the weekend watching everything unfold on a small TV in the auditorium. In 1970 I attended an intensive care workshop in Dallas and saw the room where the President died at Parkland Hospital. – Sister Janet Peters, RSM

- As a member of the first baccalaureate graduates of then Gwynedd-Mercy College (Class of 1964), I and a group of my fellow Sisters of Mercy were walking up from the Science Lab (Chemistry class) toward Assumption Hall and Mr. Connor’s history class when we heard the astounding and unbelievable news. Everyone was in a state of shock. As I remember, further classes were cancelled. – Sister Antoinette Zimmerman, RSM

- On November 22, 1963, I was sitting in my fourth grade classroom at St. Denis School in Havertown, PA. Our principal, Sister Maura, came to the classroom door and asked our teacher to step out into the hallway. Our teacher then returned to the classroom with tears in her eyes. A few minutes later, Sister Maura made an announcement over the PA system that President Kennedy had been shot and killed in Dallas, Texas. We were all shocked and saddened by the news. The next several days, we were glued to the black and white television set in our living room and watched with horror as the events unfolded following the shooting. I believe we were given the day off to watch the funeral at home with our families. November 22, 1963 will always be fresh in my mind, and the horrible feeling of shock and sadness over his death feels fresh even until now. – Sister Pat Kennedy, RSM

- I was a teacher at Gwynedd Mercy Academy and was monitoring a study period of seniors when our principal Sister Rita Powell made the sad announcement over the PA. The group sat stunned for a moment then asked to go to Chapel to pray which we did, fervently and tearfully. – Sister Margaret Donohue, RSM

- I was teaching and ending the school day. It was dismissal time when a message was sent from the principal’s office of the events in Dallas that President Kennedy had been shot. The students were crying and moved rapidly from the school building. Many parents were waiting for them when they exited the school. – Sister Jeanine Oliver, RSM