

# Kennedy assassination still haunts reporter on scene

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** — AP Hollywood reporter Bob Thomas was assigned to cover Robert F. Kennedy on the night of the 1968 California Presidential Primary. It turned out to be a story he will never forget.

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LOS ANGELES (AP) - The noise sounded like balloons popping on New Year's Eve. Then came the screams. I ran into the kitchen and saw a hellish scene.

"My God, he's been shot!" someone shrieked. "The senator's been shot."

I had been assigned to cover Robert F. Kennedy on June 4, 1968, the night of the California presidential primary.

When I arrived at the Ambassador Hotel, Democrats in the Embassy Room were already celebrating, even though the polls had not yet closed. A jazz band blared George M. Cohan songs, straw-hatted party loyalists stood two-deep at the bar. I spoke to a few of the movie celebrities, then reported to the press room near the entrance to the ballroom.

Throughout the long evening, I shuttled back and forth between the rooms, always by the quickest route, the kitchen.

The candidate remained in his suite upstairs.

Near midnight, a press aide told us that Kennedy would be coming down to make his victory speech, then proceed directly to the press room to answer questions.

I decided to remain in the press room, because the AP office could cover the speech from television. I watched the monitor as Kennedy made his cry for healing the wounds of Vietnam, then disappeared with his group through the bandstand curtains amid still-ringing cheers.

Then it happened.

The noise was deafening when I reached the kitchen. Men were shouting, women wailing. I saw athletes Rafer Johnson and Rosey Grier pinning someone against a table. Others stood in a circle, staring downward in absolute shock.

I couldn't see what they were looking at, so I leaped on a table (later I discovered it was a stack of kitchen trays). I gazed down and saw Bobby Kennedy lying on the cement floor, blood streaming from his head, eyes staring sightlessly into the void.

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## Dream weaver

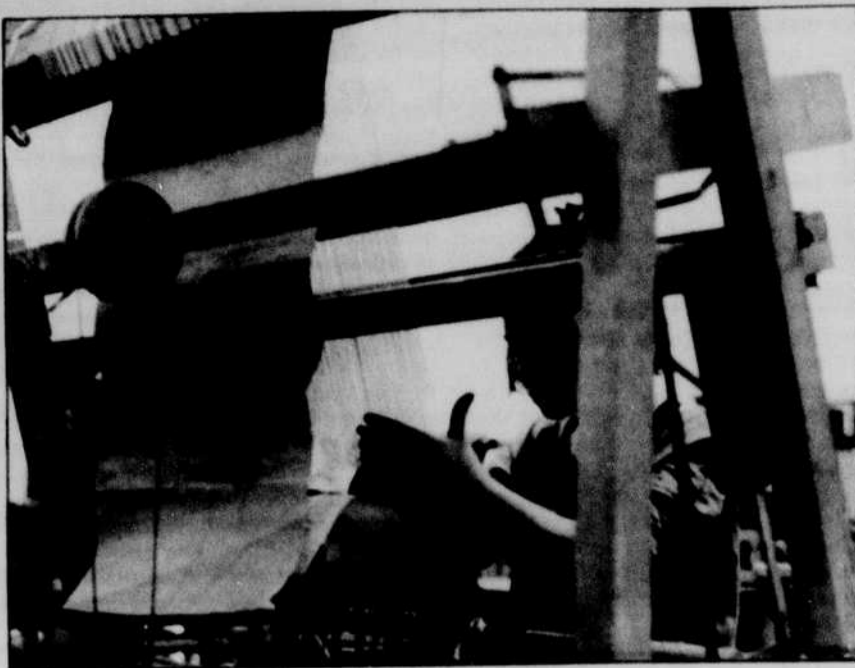


Photo by Leslie Galiano

Fine and applied arts senior Maryann Kelley concentrates on completing her final project for Advanced Fibers. She is weaving a multi-colored mat.

## RFK

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returning as a hero to the Middle East has faded. If released after his ninth parole hearing next year, he will be 50 years old, having spent half his life locked up.

Israel and the Arabs are in the midst of lumbering negotiations over the Arabs' demand to recover lost territory and Israel's bid for a secure peace. The hatred and violence that shaped Sirhan's childhood is unchanged.

Where would the river of his-

tory have flowed without Sirhan's insane act in the pantry of a Los Angeles hotel?

...

"Kennedy was doing a lot of things behind my back," Sirhan shouted in the courtroom at his murder trial.

The young Sirhan had been uprooted from his home in Jordan by the Arab-Israeli war in 1948. His dislike for Jews was no secret from those who knew him. The Six-Day War "was all we talked about," an acquaintance said.

He described an Arab soldier allowing him to look through binoculars at the Jewish part of Jerusalem. "That's our land out there, our land," Sirhan remembered being told. "I didn't understand what he meant, but now I understand."

He was calm throughout his testimony except when he was asked about Israel. At those times he could barely contain his agitation.

When he talked about his life in America, Sirhan recalled watching a television documentary that showed Robert

Kennedy, years before, as a young reporter for the *Boston Globe* in Israel, helping to celebrate that country's independence in 1948.

Sirhan said he jotted his May 18 "RFK must die" note after hearing Kennedy on the radio advocating sending 50 fighter planes to Israel.

"Did you shoot Robert F. Kennedy?" asked Sirhan's attorney, Grant Cooper.

"Yes, sir."

"Did you bear any ill will toward Sen. Kennedy?"

"No."

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Four million people a year visit the grave of John F. Kennedy in Arlington National Cemetery. The site has an exceptional view. In a straight line, the eye falls on the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument and in the distance, the United States Capitol. The majestic words of the president, so well known, are carved in granite.

To the right and a few steps behind is a small reflecting pool and a white cross. Robert Kennedy, as always, is at his brother's side.

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