

T-MINUS TWO

"Everybody remembers what they were doing when Kennedy was shot," my mother says. "I had taken Jon to get his hair cut, and we were in the barbershop when it came over the radio. The announcer said, 'ladies and gentlemen, President Kennedy has been shot.' Just like that. The barber stopped cutting and said he was going to close up shop for the day. We walked out of there with only half a hair cut out of respect for the president. Oh, I was so upset I just started crying when we got to the car."

My sister says she remembers the principal announcing it over the p.a. system. But that's impossible because she was only three years old then and would have been too young to be in school.

Kennedy was killed two months before I was born. My brother was five years old at the time, and he says he can remember it like it was yesterday. I believe him. He remembers everything like a tape recorder. He can spit out dates and events, but he can't tell stories very well. I'm the only one in my family who's good at telling stories, but I wasn't quite whole the day Kennedy was shot. I do remember seeing replays of it on TV, over and over again, of Jackie Kennedy standing up in the car and leaning over the body.

"We were reviewing that smart ass Herb Fletcher's dissertation when Bob came in and told us," my father says. "You remember Herb, don't you, dear?"

My mother squints her eyes like she can't remember, then nods her head.

"Maybe it was when Robert Kennedy was shot that I remember," my sister says.

"Maybe that was it."

My mother says she doesn't remember what she was doing that day.

"I may have been shopping," she says.

My father says Robert Kennedy was shot at night and I look to my brother for confirmation. I was five then and my brother was ten.

"Dad's right," my brother says, and we all nod our heads in agreement.

"Martin Luther King?" my sister asks as though she's wondering how she could have forgotten so much of her history.

"He got shot a couple months before RFK," my brother says.

"All I remember was someone got shot and my teacher cried," my sister says.

"It was probably Miss Gallagher," my brother says, nodding his head like he is looking at a blueprint. "She taught third grade, room 7B," he says matter of factly.

I try to imagine Miss Gallagher breaking down and crying in front of the class. As I remember, she was young and pretty. All the other teachers in our school were old and hard, and wouldn't have cried for anything.

"All I remember is walking out of that barbershop when John Kennedy was shot," my mother says. "It was as though something was lost that day, I knew right then that things would never be the same."

I keep going over the pictures in my mind, of the convertible, and Jackie's dress, and her little pill-box hat. There's a pause, and the film slows for a few agonizing seconds. The bullet hits and Jackie leans over the body. The front of her dress and her gloves are stained

with blood. The film returns to normal speed, and the limousine races away, and I'm beginning to think maybe I remember. Maybe I felt something down there, t-minus two and counting.