

# Austin American-Statesman

## Fondly remembering JFK ... and Jackie

By JIM COMER

In November 1963, I was 18 going on 12, only theoretically past puberty, somehow a sophomore at San Antonio's Trinity University. Callow, untested by anything more threatening than an hour exam, I breathed air unpolluted by experience. Robert Browning with a Texas accent, I believed that "God was in His heaven and all's right with the world."

Then into my college cocoon came the Kennedys. He may have been slipping in the Gallup Poll, but she was on the cover of Photoplay. Even for a diehard Republican like me, the Kennedy charm had a powerful pull. They were the most glamorous couple in creation.

When the San Antonio Light announced their motorcade route, I knew I had to see them. That their arrival coincided with my biology lab did not deter me. When forced to choose between a president and an unborn pig, I opted for the president.

In the questionable company of three liberals, I headed for the parade route. San Antonio's Latino majority had turned out in huge numbers to greet our first Catholic president. It was a fiesta: balloons, homemade signs, children screaming and vendors selling tacos. Despite my conservative convictions, I was swept up in the excitement.

We stood waiting in the warm Texas sun. No Kennedys. Not even a preceding dignitary. During this lull, I spotted a florist shop across the street and had a sudden inspiration. I scurried across the blocked-off thoroughfare and soon returned grasping a long-stemmed rose. I borrowed a pen from a friend and scribbled some words on a scrap of paper: WELCOME TO TEXAS



Jim Comer



Mrs. Kennedy in the motorcade as it leaves San Antonio Airport. The Kennedys were in San Antonio the day before the assassination.

FROM A FRIENDLY REPUBLICAN

I pinned the note to my 50-cent flower. Let no one say that our state did not provide true Southern hospitality.

Suddenly we heard the distant rumble of a motorcade: They had arrived. Who cared about a stalled civil-rights bill or a few advisers in Vietnam? Today, Camelot convened here.

As the open limousine came into sight, the procession halted abruptly. Instinctively I realized that this was my chance. Flower in hand, I began running toward the immobile presidential chariot. I got by the police with ease. After all, who could be threatened by a 5' 7" teen-ager carrying a rose?

Soon I was parallel with the convertible. Dauntless, I plunged through a phalanx of Secret Service men, imploring them to let me through. Whatever I said must have worked.

We were face to face, only a few feet apart. She was gorgeous, and his tan was perfect. They looked even better in person than they did on TV. I held out the rose to her and yelled over the roar of the crowd, "Please, take it. It's for you."

She hesitated, reached out her hand, took my long-stemmed offering, read the note and smiled. Then she handed it to him. The president glanced at my words, laughed out loud and treated me to the full Kennedy grin. At that moment the car began to move. They were off to dedicate something. Gone. The following noon, in my hometown, he would be gone forever.

I survived, passed biology with a generous C- and became a political science major because I didn't know what else to do.

Thirty-six years have rubbed the pink glow from my eyes. I still keep up with politics, try not to be cynical and vote my conscience when I get the chance. But I long for a time when God was in His heaven and all seemed right with the world.

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