

My last look at Mr. President

By Cheryl McKinnon
Staff Writer

Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas, is a lovely square. It sits in the heart of the downtown area, a haven for those who want to enjoy their lunch under a tree on a spot of grass.

On Nov. 22, 1963, I stood, along with hundreds of others, on the grassy knoll in Dealey Plaza, waiting for just one thing — a chance to see, even for just a moment, that magical person, the president, John F. Kennedy.

I had prepared for days to be in the plaza. As a journalism major in school, my plans were to write a story about my experiences as a class project. Kennedy was for me the ideal of what a president should be — young and aggressive, yet thoughtful and seemingly genuinely concerned for his fellow man.

As we stood watching the



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motorcade turn onto Elm Street, I tried to grasp every tiny detail of both President and Mrs. Kennedy. "How happy they look," I thought. Suddenly three shots in rapid succession rang out. Myself and

dozens of others standing nearby turned in horror toward the back of the grassy knoll where it seemed the sounds had originated. Puffs of white smoke still hung in the air in small patches. But no one was visible.

Turning back to the street, now terribly frightened, I suddenly realized the president was no longer sitting up in the seat waving to the crowd. He was slumped over toward his wife, whose facial expression left no doubt as to what had occurred. The motorcade was beginning to gain speed and soon passed under the railroad trestle headed for its eventual destination, Parkland Hospital.

It was an impressionable teenage girl who watched the assassination of a president, but today, 20 years later, it is still as clear in my mind as if it happened this morning. One moment they were laughing and waving. The next moment, both men

were slumped over and pandemonium reigned.

As the months passed, following the shootings of first Kennedy, then Oswald and then the deaths of Ruby and others, I tried to maintain the faith with my government. I have read the Warren Commission Report in its entirety and dozens of other books as well. I am sorry to say that the only thing I am absolutely sure of today is that at least two of the shots fired that day in Dealey Plaza came from behind where I stood on the knoll, not from the book depository.

I can't accuse the government of hiding the truth or lying about the assassination, because no matter what I may personally believe, I have no proof. But that day in Dallas and those that followed left their mark and I have never quite had the same faith and trust in those that lead us as I did before.