



Scraps and Ramblings..Where were you?

At a friend's good suggestion, not all word thoughts on this blog will be political. Some will be just be about my living here in this county...this county of Morgan. Cropping up will be various observations and recollections. I recently learned the value of being more observant from a book have been reading, "Rural Free." The subject is a favorite of mine -- rural Indiana living. The author is Rachel Peden. Rachel was the mother of Joe Peden, a genuine to the core Hoosier, whom fellow Commissioner Norm Voyles and I worked with for several years. We were on the County Soil and Water Conservation board. Joe was our district conservationist. Recently Joe was recognized for his life of outstanding contributions at the Purdue Ag Alumni Fish Fry. He did more than just work for conserving our natural resources... he conserved people much like his mother conserved the beauty of rural living. Rachel's wrote regular columns for several farm magazines and newspapers. They were warm and astute observations about rural Indiana living. The column was called "Scraps From a Farm Wife's Journal." I had her column in mind when I decided to name this collection of observations, "Scraps and Ramblings." In the pattern of another Hoosier author, Gene Stratton Porter, her works cause you see more...appreciate more... and love your living more. What a gift.

In that vein of appreciation through observation and recollection, my wife Lynn and I were reliving the events of this this day nearly five decades ago, November 22, 1963. Many of you may not only know of the event form the history books and what others relate. Here is a witnessed story of that terrible day.

We were students at Indiana State. She was a Freshman and I was somewhere around a Junior. We had not met yet...that would happen the following April. That day chilly day in November I was headed toward my job on the switch board at Human Center. Human Center was the originally the Deming Hotel there in Terre Haute. It had been converted into a dormitory to accommodate the exploding student population. The switch board was a left over of the hotel days. It was one of those old fashioned affairs where you had seven trunk lines for incoming calls below and plugs for all the seven floors of rooms above. The task consisted of connecting the incoming calls to the room requested with these retracting cords and then pulling a toggle to ring the room being careful not to mix or worse yet disconnect the ongoing conversations. I did that once with a call from Cuba. The second floor had suites occupied professional families--doctors and such that had found a way to escape the Castro regime.

On that particular day I had just left the Industrial Education building, the building where young men learned how to be "shop teachers." I had a habit of walking through there as it had that hot oil smell that reminded me of the job shop where my dad worked in Indy. As I was just crossing Cherry Street in the spitting snow, a couple of students shouted "Have you heard---- the President's just been shot.... in Dallas." In an instant, it was no longer just a gray November day. I looked at a billboard and seeing an advertisement for a New Mustang. I was attempting to connect the ordinary with the extraordinary. I hurried to my job and settled in to my work while listening to events on a purple little Arvin radio that was to the shelf by the right of the switchboard. The ear one eared headphones and a mic placed in position, I went to work. The board flashing lights were lit like a Christmas tree. Everyone wanted to talk --to connect with their friends. I had just plugged in a connection with boy I knew on the 7th floor

and the incoming call from his sister in Burford Hall when the never to be forgotten breaking up words of Walter Conkrite reported, "This just in. President Kennedy has died in Dallas." The sister screamed in my headphone. The next hours...days... were mind numbing..... John-John saluting...the horse with boots reversed..... the assassin assassinated ... the muffled drums. The playing of Navy hymn. which never fails to this day to return me to those solemn and tragic days. I never want to see their likes again..and pray God I never will. I do not recall Thanksgiving that year.

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