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JFK IS DEAD!

Our **Richard** recalls a significant moment in history which still resonates with him today



ne of the perils of having an eccentric father is that his legacy lives on, long after his death. He was one of these people who would dominate a roomful of people. He did not suffer fools gladly and he wrote all his letters in a purple felt tipped pen.

He would also attract famous people into our lives. For him it started early: as a young boy he was chased by Rudyard Kipling who found him fishing on his patch of water.

He lived before the days of Facebook, Twitter or emails (or at least he refused to acknowledge their existence). He corresponded with politicians, film stars, assorted people with titles and numerous writers (he was a writer himself and he contributed the middle page article to the Eastern Daily Press for many years). He exchanged letters with the likes of Margaret Thatcher, Joyce Grenfell, David Frost, Lady Di's mother and JFK (about whom more in a moment).

When Clement Freud was MP for Isle of Ely he would be an occasional visitor to our house. I remember one evening he came to supper. He sat throughout the evening with a long face and looked like a beagle with indigestion.

When we had all flown the nest, the entire family was staying in a hotel in Devon. My father suddenly turned up with 'this nice young American couple'. They were a Mr and Mrs Bush.

This was the time of the first George Bush's Presidency.

'Are you anything to do with the President?' I asked.

'Oh yes, he's my brother'. It turned out that he was Jonathan Bush, the brother of the first President Bush. My parents stayed in touch with them for some considerable time afterwards but then they never did actually meet the president, though it was on the cards apparently.

Nor did we meet President John F Kennedy, the 50th anniversary of whose death was marked in November. However, we all felt that we knew him.

My mother was American and, true to form, my father wrote to Kennedy telling him that he wanted to start an election campaign in Cambridgeshire (confident, no doubt, that that would make all the difference). My parents had taken against his opponent Richard Nixon – and how right they turned out to be!

Kennedy wrote that it was good to learn 'that I already have at least some small pockets of support in the British Isles. I am asking my staff to send you, under separate cover, some campaign materials so that my campaign can move ahead at once in Cambridgeshire.'

For several weeks the family went around wearing Kennedy for President buttons and my parents' cars were festooned with bumper stickers.

Our efforts obviously made all the difference because John F Kennedy then became the country's youngest elected president.

I was 12 at the time and sent him a congratulatory letter (also telling him how to run the country). In due course, I too, received a reply which thanked me for the 'very friendly message you sent to me after my election to the presidency'.

In his powerful inaugural address Kennedy set out his agenda for the following four years. His words 'ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country' are as relevant now as they were 53 years ago.

We then watched his progress over the next three years - developing a fondness for the man as he grappled with the difficulties of the Cuban missile crisis and civil rights problems and set America on course for putting a man on the moon.

Then on November 22 1963 I was sitting at home doing my homework. We lived in Elm. My parents were in the village hall listening to a talk by the then MP for the Isle of Ely, Harry Legge-Bourke. My brother was watching a film at the Empire Cinema in Wisbech.

A friend came to our house and asked: 'Have you heard the news? Kennedy's been shot!'

I raced to the village hall to break the news to my parents. At the Empire Cinema a notice was flashed on the screen and my brother bicycled home. The whole family was in tears and we all felt that we had suffered a personal tragedy and that the great hope that we held for the future had been snuffed out.

50 years after the assassination I spoke on local radio about that experience and found, even then, that I was beginning to choke up with tears.

The world, of course, did not end and we will never know whether Kennedy would have been a wonderful president or would have been consigned to the history books. What I do know is that his assassination had a huge impact on our family and in a sense life was never quite the same again.

F. KENNEDY
MASSACHUSETTS

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D. C.

August 8, 1960

Mr. David Barr
Soffits
Elm
Nr Wisbeck
Cambridgeshire, England

Dear Mr. Barr:

It was good of you to write me after the Convention and to learn that I already have at least some small pockets of support in the British Isles. I hope that my campaign will merit your confidence.

I am asking my staff to send you under separate cover some campaign materials so that my campaign can move ahead at once in Cambridgeshire.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D. C.

December 5, 1960

Mr. Richard Barr
Nowton Court
Bary St. Edwards
Suffolk, England

Dear Mr. Barr:

I want to thank you for the very friendly message you sent to me after my election to the presidency.

I am most heartened by the many expressions of good will which I have received. I am sure that they reflect a broad unity of purpose in our nation. I hope that my record during the next four years will sustain your generous confidence.

With every good wish, I am

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy