

Higher ground



**Philip
Dine**

There are public events that leave you remembering where you were, regardless of how much time has elapsed. Little as I was, that was the case with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in 1963. The same occurred just five years later when in rapid—and tragic—succession, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy were shot as they were trying in their own ways to lift our nation to a better place.

All three were my political heroes, all three were gunned down as young men—Jack Kennedy was 46, his brother 42, King not yet 40.

On the wall of my office at NALC Headquarters, a place I haven't

been to for 10 months, are framed letters from the president and the senator delivered by a letter carrier to a very young fan of theirs.

By Sept. 11, 2001, I had three little kids of my own, and I had just dropped two of them off at school when the World Trade Center was attacked. I was a defense reporter at the time, so I called a source at the Pentagon to ask if they would be holding a press conference. In words I remember two decades later, he told me that they planned a briefing shortly, unless "...we're overtaken by events."

Minutes later, a plane piloted by terrorists set the Pentagon ablaze.

Wandering that afternoon through Washington, DC—a city simultaneously awash in chaos, in fear and in security forces—seeking a functioning newsroom to file a story and wondering what I would file to capture the moment, I spotted David McCullough walking with his wife and another couple.

The historian was a few feet from me, as history exploded around us. I asked for an interview. He politely but firmly told me he was going to the Washington Mall to speak at the inaugural National Book Festival (which somehow was not canceled) and was running late.

I thanked him, told him I understood and mentioned in parting that my late parents, Joe and Laurie Dine, had always spoken highly of him and of how much they enjoyed their friendship with him in the Massachusetts town where they had retired.

He stopped on a dime, confirmed that they were indeed my parents, then motioned to the others to proceed without him. "I'm going to do this interview," he said.

In the nation's capital, on a day unlike any other in U.S. history, I found myself on the sidewalk interviewing the greatest living American historian about what it all meant.

I am not drawing a comparison with the events that transpired in the U.S. Capitol less than a week ago as I write this. Nor do I pretend to know what impact those events will have moving forward or what importance historians will bestow on them.

What I do know is this: That place that was attacked by that mob is personal to me.

I reported from the halls of Congress for a dozen years before joining NALC. I knew lawmakers of both parties, liberals and conservatives and moderates, and I knew their staffers. I teased them for their political views and their policy positions; they teased me right back as an unkempt journalist. I tried to treat them fairly in print. They often approached me with exclusive stories, though they could have gone to more important reporters at bigger newspapers. When I wrote a book, one of them wrote the foreword; others from across the political spectrum wrote blurbs. I loved the place, and I loved the people I dealt with.

One of my daughters lived in a Capitol Hill apartment in the summer of 2018 and worked as a congressional intern, soaking up knowledge—and spouting terminology I hadn't learned.

My brother retired five years ago as chief of police of the United States Capitol Police, and I cannot think of many media outlets that over the past week haven't sought his views on what happened on Jan. 6, and why.

Decades ago, after my father retired from journalism, he served as a congressional staff member for a legislator who was on the House Veterans Affairs' Committee, using his background as a World War II veteran to advise her.

And I work at a union a stone's throw from the 535 lawmakers we affectionately (sometimes, anyway) dub our employer's board of directors.

I watched those events unfold at the Capitol, and I felt almost as if my home were being invaded.

As those two men in the spring of 1968 were trying so valiantly to do, we need people to lift us to higher ground.

EDITORIAL STAFF:
Director of Communications and Media Relations Philip Dine
Designer/Web Editor Mike Shea
Writer/Editor Rick Hodges
Writer/Editor Jenessa Wagner
Editorial Assistant Clare Foley

The Postal Record (ISSN 0032-5376) is published monthly by the National Association of Letter Carriers. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, DC, and at additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, NALC, 100 Indiana Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-2144.

Subscription included in membership dues. First-class subscription available for \$20 per year (contact Membership Department).

© 2021 by the National Association of Letter Carriers.

Circulation: 287,000. Union-printed using soy-based inks.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS? Contact the Membership Department.

Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube by going to NALC.org.

