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Interview with  
ELSTON BROOKS  
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Place of Interview: Ft. Worth, Texas  
Interviewer: Alice Bowen  
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Oral History Collection

Elston Brooks

Interviewer: Alice Anita Bowen.

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas      Date of Interview: March 21, 1984

Bowen:            This is Alice Anita Bowen for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 21, 1984, in Fort Worth, Texas. I am interviewing Elston Brooks to obtain his recollections concerning the Kennedy assassination on November 22, 1963.

                  All right, Elston, let's start out by getting some background information about you--your hometown, have you lived in Fort Worth, things like that.

Brooks:           Well, I was born in Kansas City, Missouri, but I fully consider myself a Fort Worth native because we moved here when my father was transferred here when I was six years old. When I was eight years old, I started putting out a little neighborhood newspaper--one sheet. I would have to take it from door to door and wait there until they read it until I could take it to the next subscriber.

Bowen:           One-copy edition.

Brooks:           One-copy edition, that's right--on a portable typewriter. So I decided that right then and there I wanted to be a newspaperman.

Bowen:           Why did you get interested in it? Was anybody in your

family...

Brooks: Not necessarily, no. I just knew, oh, since the time I was eight that that's what I wanted to do, and I was lucky enough to obtain it--the hard way because I left home when I was sixteen and was putting myself through Paschal High School and was allowed to take journalism in my junior year by Margaret Caskey, the dean of high school journalism teachers at Paschal. I was lucky. I blush to tell you that I wrote a column called "Babbling Brooks," and it won the state championship of Texas my junior year. I took journalism again my senior year--non-credit--and no one had ever won it two years in a row because no one had ever taken journalism for two years in a row.

Bowen: Hmm.

Brooks: And, luckily, I won it--the championship--for a second straight time, and Mrs. Caskey thought that that would be enough to get me a college scholarship. It didn't. No one offered a college scholarship, and I certainly couldn't afford to get there. But the Fort Worth Press offered me a job to start writing teenage news once a week, the "Teen Times" page.

Bowen: Were you in school at that time?

Brooks: Yes. So by the time I had graduated from Paschal, at the age of seventeen, I was at the Press and doing the job that I wanted without a college education. One year later, after

doing it for a year at the Press, I came over to the Star-Telegram and asked them if I could write this column for them. They said, "Sure," and they hired me at \$10 more a week.

Bowen: This was the teenage column.

Brooks: Yes. But I soon found out that they wanted me to do not just a column once a week, but they were going to let me be a reporter. To people who say they got a full-fledged reporter for \$35 a week, I always say I got the chance to become a reporter without a college education and at a time when guys were coming back from Army, from World War II, and jobs were hard to get. So that's how I got in.

Bowen: What year was it that you joined the Star-Telegram?

Brooks: Nineteen forty-eight at the Star-Telegram, 1947 at the Press. After a year of covering the police beat, they were looking for somebody who had a show business background or knew something about show business and was also a writer and...to do the amusements column. I fit right in because I had my own radio program at the time. I blush to tell you that was called "Ballads by Brooks." I'd sung with bands around town and had a nightclub act. So at the age of nineteen, in 1949, I began writing a daily amusements column. I shudder to look back at them now. I don't know why they didn't fire me. I had all that smart-aleck stuff that only a nineteen-year-old can have, wanting to knock

down movies. But it lasted.

Bowen: A lot of sarcasm and that type of thing in it? Or were you just...

Brooks: No, no.

Bowen: ...being funny or...

Brooks: No, immaturity.

Bowen: Just immaturity.

Brooks: You know, like...

Bowen: Well, you were not from any background for the newspaper business. You just got into it.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: You don't know of any reason that sparked your interest? Were you a regular newspaper reader...

Brooks: Oh, yes.

Bowen: ...as a very young child?

Brooks: Oh, yes, I started reading newspapers, I suppose, at the age of eight and was so interested in it that...of course, the family took the morning and evening Star-Telegram. The smaller paper was the Fort Worth Press. And one year for Christmas, what I wanted was a subscription to the Fort Worth Press.

Bowen: Really?

Brooks: Yes. So I have just always read.

Bowen: Tell me about your Pearl Harbor edition...

Brooks: (Chuckle)

Bowen: ...of your newspaper.

Brooks: I always say that, like newspapermen all over the country, depending upon your age, you can remember what you were doing when Kennedy was assassinated and when Pearl Harbor Sunday came in--and each time I was covering the story.

However, on Pearl Harbor Sunday, I was eleven years old, and I was putting out that little one-sheeter newspaper. When the news came in...well, I realized that I was going to have to replate. I didn't yell, "Stop the presses." I just said, "Stop the paste," because I had the Star-Telegram comics pasted on the back page. But, anyway, I got out my extra, and I beat the Star-Telegram on the streets that day, at least on Marigold Street in Oakhurst.

Bowen: What was your headline?

Brooks: Well, my headline...it happened so quick. All during the day, I was having to keep changing as more and more things ...and finally I realized that there were...now it was going to mean Germany and Italy as well as Japan, and I couldn't fit all that in a headline. So I just had a one-word headline that said, "WAR!!!" I used three exclamation points to pad it out.

Bowen: Did you draw your headlines in in ink?

Brooks: Yes, I did.

Bowen: What did your neighbors think about this paper that they had to stand there and read at the door?

Brooks: Oh, they were tolerant. They were tolerant. I don't really remember too much about that. But mainly it was my family reading it.

Bowen: You charged a...

Brooks: A penny.

Bowen: A penny...

Brooks: A penny.

Bowen: ...a penny to read it.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: You were also interested in amusements at a young age. You have written a lot about going to the Parkway Theater and the Tivoli Theater and all that.

Brooks: Oh, yes, sure.

Bowen: How did you get started?

Brooks: Oh, I don't think that that was unusual. I mean, all kids... you want to go to the movies, and I don't suppose I was any more interested in the Parkway and the Tivoli than any other kid was. We all loved those serials.

Bowen: Well, when you saw the movies and had a nightclub act, you got interested in being a performer, right?

Brooks: Right, yes.

Bowen: Was this part of seeing the movies?

Brooks: No, no. The way I got started on that was that I did impersonations. And I did the singers. I think the mark that I look at today...at the age of fifty-four...I say



everybody that I impersonated is dead now.

Bowen: They can't complain then, right (laughter)? When you started making up your lists of top ten songs...where did that start?

Brooks: Well, that started in 1942 when I started listening to the "Hit Parade." It wasn't my list. I would copy down the hit parade each Saturday night. Later, when I became amusements editor of the Star-Telegram, as a teenager, I suddenly realized that I might have some clout to do something that I had always wanted to do, and so I went to New York. I wrote a letter first and made arrangements with the Lucky Strike agency--Batten, Barton, Durstine, and Osborn--to come up there and copy down all of the hit parade that I had missed.

Bowen: For how far back?

Brooks: Well, the "Hit Parade" started in 1935.

Bowen: Hmm.

Brooks: And I copied them down from 1935 through 1949 and then kept them up ever since. And then later...no, at that same time, I went to the New York Public Library and traced it back to 1930--the top ten tunes--which was the year of my birth, and then I continued it on through the years.

And that was the basis later of the radio program that I had where people would send in the date they were married or...well, the war...and I'd play the top ten tunes.

When the "Hit Parade" finally left television in 1959, I continued to do the top ten tunes of the week from Billboard.

And a year ago...two years ago...I put them into the form of a book...fifty years, each week, top ten tunes... and it's called I've Heard Those Songs Before. It was published by William Morrow in New York. I had a mixture of emotions there. What was once mine alone, exclusively, now anybody can have for the price of the book. But, anyway, I like to see it printed.

Bowen: There's so many top ten lists, though, now. How do you pick the one?

Brooks: By Billboard.

Bowen: Just Billboard?

Brooks: Just Billboard.

Bowen: You were on your own from the time you were sixteen.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: You were working during the time you were in high school.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: And then when you finished high school, you then went to full-time at the Press and then went to the Star-Telegram.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: First as teenage columnist and then you did amusements.

Brooks: Well...and police reporter.

Bowen: That was what I was going to get to next.

Brooks: Right.

Bowen: As police reporter at the same time that you were amusements reporter?

Brooks: Well, no. I left the police beat after a year to become the amusements writer. And then when the Korean War came along, I was drafted. When I came back, two years later, they had deemphasized amusements at the Star-Telegram, so I went back to being a police reporter and writing the amusements column...they said three days a week. Of course, I went ahead and wrote it five, six days a week because I was interested in it. So there was a period, a long period, where I wore two hats, one as a police reporter--and that's very incongruous--and one as the amusements writer.

Bowen: That had to lead to some odd events.

Brooks: It did. I'll say this. They knew exactly who to send the night that a...a lady was shot to death in the Hollywood Theater while they were showing "Dragnet." There didn't seem to be...(chuckle).

Bowen: (Laughter) You were the logical choice.

Brooks: I was the logical choice. And out of it came some funny things because they're such diverse beats. My first book was called Don't Dryclean My Blackjack. And where that title comes from is that, while I was on the police beat, here was some punk kid who threatened to burn down my house because I had written something about him. Kids scared me. Gangsters didn't. I went to the chief of detectives and

told him about it. And he says, "Well, here." He says, "Take this blackjack and just paste him across the head with that. That will get his attention real quick."

Well, I was completely revulsed. I mean, what am I going to do? But I stuck it in my pocket and felt a little taller, if not foolish. Well, I never heard from the kid again, and so...fade out, fade in...months later, my wife and I were wearing my other hat. We were at a movie star dinner--candlelight and wine and genteel conversation. Audie Murphy, I believe, was the star we were having for dinner. Someone remarked that fall was coming on, and it triggered this in my mind. And I turned to my wife, and I said, "Did you send my suits to the cleaners?" She said, "Yes, and I almost had your blackjack drycleaned." Well, (chuckle) this pause fell across the table. It was like everyone else was eavesdropping on Bonnie and Clyde at home.

Bowen: It didn't quite fit with the candlelight and the wine.

Brooks: No, no. But that formed the basis, though, of my book in which I told of the similar things of covering the... the violence and the amusements.

Bowen: All the gangster wars that you described...

Brooks: The gangland wars of the 1950's. I covered them all. I saw them come up out of shallow graves and wells...for eight years, I believe.

Bowen: And the went off to have dinner with movie stars.

Brooks: (Laughter)

Bowen: You wrote another book about all of the celebrities that you've...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...met, didn't you?

Brooks: Yes. I called that With a Cast of Thousands and then confessed later that, just like those movies that always said they had a cast of thousands, whoever bothered to count. I think there were 727 of them down through the years, which is an awful lot.

Bowen: Yes, it is. Who was the most memorable?

Brooks: Oh, there's no way to answer that. People have asked me who was the most memorable, who was the friendliest, who was the unfriendliest. There's just no way to determine that. They were all on their best behavior. I did write one thing about memorable...was my meeting with Tallulah Bankhead.

Bowen: When she thought you were the drunk?

Brooks: Yeah. Right.

Bowen: Tell me about that.

Brooks: Well, she was playing Fort Worth in "Private Lives" during an ice storm, and the scenery was delayed getting to the old Majestic Theater. So I thought that I would just meander backstage and interview her while we waited for

the curtain to go up. What I didn't know was that she was still in her hotel suite waiting to be notified to come to the theater.

But, anyway, I went back there and knocked on her dressing room door. And this lady, who was her secretary, came to the door and said that under no circumstances could I see her and started bumping me backwards to get out of there. I tried to explain to her that I was there with management's blessing and that it certainly wouldn't hurt anything to have an interview. The show was going to play three nights.

But anyway, she kept forcing me out, and I certainly wasn't going to resist. She bumped me back toward the stage door, which opened out into an icy alley, and I slipped and fell on the ice. At that precise moment, down at the end of the alley, here comes a taxicab and out steps Tallulah wearing her mink and her slacks and her dark glasses even at nine o'clock at night. She has to step over one of those winos that used to hang around in that alley by the Majestic Theater. She comes up, and here I am, lying on my back. I look up, and I say, "Miss Bankhead, I'm Elston Brooks of the Star-Telegram." She took one look and stepped over me and gave me a two-word interview. She said, "Oh, Gawd!"

Bowen: (Laughter)

Brooks: And then walked out of my life forever. But I'll say this

for myself. I did retain the interview without taking any notes.

Bowen: (Laughter) No notes necessary.

Brooks: No.

Bowen: Okay. Let's move on up then to 1963. You're full-time amusements?

Brooks: Oh, yes. I had been ever since I quit the police beat-- the double role--in 1958.

Bowen: You were working for the morning Star-Telegram.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: When the Kennedy visit was planned, you, as an amusements columnist, weren't really involved...

Brooks: No.

Bowen: ...in the coverage.

Brooks: Not at all, not at all. Oh, as a matter of fact, on that particular Friday, I wasn't even moved to go over to the Hotel Texas to see the president speak. I wasn't particularly motivated to do that.

Bowen: Had you ever seen him?

Brooks: Yes. I saw him when he was campaigning in Burk Burnett Park the...

Bowen: The fall...

Brooks: ...just before his election of 1960. But, anyway, on Fridays I would write my Sunday column. So I just went to the office and was writing, trying to keep it timely.

I had a bunch of Kennedy jokes, and so I was doing a series of Kennedy jokes. While I was writing that column, we... all of our reporters...of course, we covered it so extensively. We had so many people, and some had been at the Hotel Texas. Some had been at Carswell when they went to fly back over to Dallas, and then others flew over on the press plane, the White House press plane, and got on the buses in the motorcade to cover him in Dallas.

Bowen: How many people, would you say, were assigned to cover this particular visit?

Brooks: Twenty.

Bowen: That's quite a few for it.

Brooks: Oh, yes, yes. I think it was. They were broken up into teams...three teams. So when a flash came through on the AP saying that shots had been fired in the motorcade, well, it just electrified the city room. We had our people over there, but we knew we were going to need more. So I jumped up, quit writing my column, and went up to the managing editor, Lorin McMullen, and I said, "I'll help," meaning, I thought in my own mind, that "I'll swing in on the city desk and help out with the stories that come through." He said, "Go to Parkland Hospital."

Bowen: Let me ask you right there. You got the first news flash off the AP wire?

Brooks: Yes.



Bowen: According to what I've read, the AP's first account was garbled, and then it came in correct a little bit later. And the UP was first on it. But you had the AP.

Brooks: Yes. We didn't have UPI.

Bowen: Okay, you also had your people there. How much longer was it before you got a telephone call from the reporter-- the first reporter on the scene?

Brooks: I don't know because I was gone.

Bowen: You were gone.

Brooks: Immediately.

Bowen: Did you make the trip by yourself?

Brooks: No. What it was...Tony Record, a photographer, was running through the city room at that time, and the managing editor said, "Go with Tony Record. Go in his car." Mike Cochran of the Associated Press, who headquartered in the Star-Telegram building, also was there and says, "Can I go?" Record said, "Sure." And then one of our reporters who had been at Carswell but had not...well, obviously, had not gone over to Dallas, was just coming in from Carswell, and they said, "You go with them, too." He was Jack Tinsley, who today is the executive editor of the Star-Telegram. And so the four of us...

Bowen: That's Jack Tinsley and Tony Record...

Brooks: ...Mike Cochran...

Bowen: ...Mike Cochran and...

Brooks: ...myself. The four of us.

Bowen: In Tony Record's...

Brooks: ...in Tony Record's car. We took off across the Turnpike. As we were driving, these reports kept coming in--fragmentary, as you know--over the radio.

Bowen: You were listening to the radio?

Brooks: Oh, yes.

Bowen: Trying to get as much information as you can.

Brooks: Sure, right. And one of them said that blood had been sighted in the motorcade. I'll never forget what I thought at that moment. I said, "They actually winged the president. This will be a page-one story for days."

Bowen: You didn't comprehend the fact that it might have been fatal at that time.

Brooks: No way, no way. I mean, that...that just couldn't...couldn't happen. So then another report came in as we were speeding along, and it says that they think that Governor Connally had been hit. Well, Tinsley and I were in the back seat, and I mentioned to him that I had an idea. I knew John and Nellie Connally, and I said, "I will bet you that there is so much confusion at that hospital that we can walk right in." You know, if you act like you're supposed to and...I knew they would have the press corps, the White House press corps, and all of our people sequestered in a press room, as indeed they did. And I said, "But I imagine

we can get in, and we can talk to Nellie, and she could tell us what was happening." I said, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained. We'll try it."

Bowen: Had the paper known they were going to Parkland when you went over there? You knew you were going to Parkland Hospital?

Brooks: Yes, yes. So this didn't happen immediately upon that bulletin. There had been time. I mean, immediately upon reading the bulletin is when I started saying, "Can I help?" Obviously, some time had elapsed there before we found out where.

Bowen: You had to wait until some more news, a little bit more, came in to start...

Brooks: Well, yes, to say that they had gone to Parkland Hospital was all that...

Bowen: You know, a lot of people, when they first heard that news, thought it was a bad joke.

Brooks: Really?

Bowen: Did you?

Brooks: No.

Bowen: It never occurred to you that it was a joke?

Brooks: Oh, no. No, no. No, because the AP just doesn't...they just don't do that.

Bowen: Well, in the news room, before you went to the hospital, was it very quiet? Very hectic? What was the mood up there?

Brooks: Very, very calm because what we had out was our first edition of...already completed everything that had happened that morning at the breakfast. And we had story after story after story, page after page, that were all eventually pulled out and destroyed...

Bowen: Yes.

Brooks: ...to make over. But this was the calm after the storm, as far as we were concerned.

Bowen: It was very quiet, and then the bulletin came in. Was it pretty organized, or was there a lot of confusion in assigning people to stories?

Brooks: No, it was...it was very organized, but we knew...we put a "stop the presses."

Bowen: Immediately?

Brooks: Immediately. Oh, yes. Just to get in the bulletin.

Bowen: Okay, so they sent the four of you over. Were there any others that they sent over?

Brooks: Oh, yes, others were sent.

Bowen: In different cars.

Brooks: In different cars, yes, sure.

Bowen: With different assignments to do.

Brooks: That's right.

Bowen: Did you have a specific assignment?

Brooks: No.

Bowen: ...You were told go see what you can get?

Brooks: Oh, yes, right. No, we had no specific assignment.

Bowen: What did you talk about in the car going over there? Were you just listening to the radio or were you going to...

Brooks: Just listening to the radio.

Bowen: And speculations about a conspiracy then or anything more on it at that time?

Brooks: I know that we always used the same word--"they."

Bowen: "They?"

Brooks: I don't know who "they" was supposed to be. I know that at that moment I hated Dallas...that this had happened. I guess the only thing that we talked about was "they." "They"... "They" got him. I said, "Just think! "They" winged him!" We had no...oh, no, nothing about a conspiracy or anything. It was too early for that. Then, of course, there was my conversation with Jack. We talked about that-- what we were going to do.

When we got to Parkland, it was just, as I said, mass confusion. To this extent: we could not get any closer than three blocks to Parkland. We pulled up. There were cars on lawns, and so we pulled up on the lawn, too, and were quite sure we were pinned in afterwards. But I don't know because I never got back to the group.

Bowen: You went by way of Stemmons? The Turnpike and then Stemmons?

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: And then pulled off.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: Did you get off before the Parkland exit, or did you...

Brooks: No, no.

Bowen: That's because you just couldn't find a place up close to the hospital.

Brooks: No, we couldn't. When we ran up to the entrance, sure enough, there were just people milling around, and there was just, you know, mass confusion.

Bowen: What entrance did you go to?

Brooks: Well, not the main one. I told Jack, "Let's go to a different one."

Bowen: Were you familiar enough with the hospital to...

Brooks: Oh, I'd never been there in my life. I was just trying to find an entrance that was not the main entrance. We found such an entrance on one side of the building. I don't even remember.

Bowen: Not the emergency room entrance or the main entrance?

Brooks: No, no, because I didn't know where that was. But I just wanted to get in the hospital and then find the emergency room.

Bowen: Were all four of you going to the same entrance?

Brooks: No, only Jack and I. Tony Record and Mike Cochran went off their way, and I never saw them again for the rest of the time.

Bowen: You never made any arrangements to meet back because of the...

Brooks: Oh, no, no. We didn't have any idea what was going to happen.

Luckily, we opened this door, and it led to a flight of stairs down. At the bottom of these stairs was an entrance to the emergency room.

Bowen: No one was at that first outside door?

Brooks: No one was at that outside door at all, and we had our press cards out. So we pushed open the door of the emergency room, not the main door but a door which led to it. Sure enough, there was a...a policeman was indeed standing at the door--a uniformed policeman. So we held up our press cards and said that we were the press. He said, "I'm sorry." He said, "You can't come in."

Bowen: Who was that? A Dallas city policeman?

Brooks: A Dallas city policeman and in uniform. He said, "You cannot come in. The press is being taken care of upstairs." Well, we kind of figured that. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Bowen: Worth a chance.

Brooks: Sure. But as he had that swinging door open, Jack and I saw a casket being wheeled down the aisle. So when we got up to the top of the stairs, I stopped to take a note. At the very minute the president was being treated, someone in the hospital had died. I would look that up later to find out who it was. It would make an interesting story.

And then it struck me. In all the years that I had been a police reporter...when someone dies in an emergency

room, they don't send the coffin to the hospital. They send the body to a funeral home.

Bowen: That must have been a chilling thought.

Brooks: It was. Right at that moment, it was a very chilling thought. There's no way that anyone had ever sent a coffin to an emergency room. So we went upstairs.

Bowen: Was that your first inkling...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...that it had been fatal? Do you know what time that was?

Brooks: What?

Bowen: Any idea of how long it...how long it had taken...how much time had taken place?

Brooks: I'd say that probably was about one o'clock at the time. He was already dead at that time. I'm sure it was about one o'clock.

Bowen: I think he was pronounced dead at one, but after they had consulted and...

Brooks: Well, right.

Bowen: ...made it official.

Brooks: Right. That is true. And, of course, he was pronounced dead at one o'clock. But the doctors consulted later and decided to say it was one o'clock. But by the time the news was broken and announced, it was way after one o'clock.

Bowen: Right.



Brooks: I don't know...it could have been two o'clock. I just don't remember now. So Jack and I went upstairs to where the White House press corps was.

Bowen: Did you have any trouble finding them?

Brooks: No. We just asked, "Where is the press?"

Bowen: You didn't have trouble getting in there with your press cards in your hand?

Brooks: Nope. No, no one asked. Not a person asked.

Bowen: Security was rather loose then, really.

Brooks: I guess they just figured that if you weren't a reporter, you wouldn't be saying you were. I don't know, but, no, we were never asked for anything.

Bowen: Do you know if Johnson was still in the hospital at that time or had he left for Love Field?

Brooks: I don't know, but I imagine he had left for Love Field. I just don't know.

Bowen: So you remained upstairs...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...in two classrooms set aside, or one classroom or something set aside for that purpose.

Brooks: That's right.

Bowen: Was the press conference going on when you got there?

Brooks: Oh, it had been going on for a long time, but various things...no announcement had been made of his death. At the time I walked in, Julian Read, a former Fort Worth Press

sportswriter and, as a matter of fact, the man who was instrumental in getting my job for me at the Press and one of my closest friends...he was John Connally's press aide. Julian was standing at a blackboard diagramming how they were seated in the limo. Robert Hilburn of our Washington bureau spotted me when I walked in. He came up to me, and he says, "I'm going to telephone what we've already got." He says, "You go ahead and take notes here." I said, "Okay." And so I took notes while he was gone.

Bowen: Did you take notes of the doctors...Julian Read...or what Julian Read was doing?

Brooks: Whatever was going on.

Bowen: Whatever was going on.

Brooks: Whatever was going on.

Bowen: How long were you in there?

Brooks: I would say ten minutes, and then Hilburn returned. When he returned, I left again to phone in what I had. At that time I went out in the hall. Here were a couple of Southwestern Bell telephone men with about ten, twelve telephones--all in cellophane packages--and they were trying to set them up for the press. There was no way that you could get to a pay telephone.

Bowen: I've read that that was very difficult...

Brooks: Oh, yes.

Bowen: ...,to get to a phone.

- Brooks: So I just took an elevator, and I went to the top floor and walked until I found a nurses' stand. But it had clerical people in it. There was an office, behind that. So I walked in and told them, "I'm a reporter, and I want to call my office, and if you'd like to hear what I know so far...." Well, of course, they did. They immediately gave me a phone, and I phoned in my sparse little information.
- Bowen: Did you have any trouble getting an outside line?
- Brooks: Nope, nope. It was just finding the instrument. That was the problem. I knew you were never going to find it on the first floor at a pay telephone stand.
- Bowen: I've read that the secret service men had a lot of trouble getting outside lines for a period until they could get them hooked up, so you were very lucky. Most people were getting...they were going from phone to phone to phone trying to find one that they could get a dial tone on.
- Brooks: Yes, yes. But, remember, this is later. I don't know. I usually...I got my call right through to the city desk, and all these people stood around listening.
- Bowen: They were up there--could not leave--and yet they were in the dark as far as knowing something was going on and not knowing what?
- Brooks: Yes, right. The whole nation was wondering what was going on, and it was going on in their hospital. But they weren't privy to getting into press conferences or anything like that.

Bowen: What kind of news were you reporting back to the paper?

Brooks: Just the very sparse little things that...Julian Read's blackboard talk and whatever else had come up until Bob Hilburn returned.

Bowen: Were you there when Dr. Perry made his report?

Brooks: Yes. After making that telephone call, I went back to the press room. Just as I got there, here comes the herd thundering out. I remember that Seth Kantor of the Fort Worth Press was there. He looked at me, and he had tears in his eyes. He says, "He's dead." I couldn't believe it because I still didn't know the severity of what was happening.

Bowen: Even after seeing the casket...

Brooks: Well.

Bowen: ...being rolled down the...

Brooks: The casket...no, of course not. I just...maybe I had that suspicion. Maybe I had that suspicion. But maybe I had that suspicion that that could have been John Connally's. So I don't know. But I was stunned. I just didn't think it could happen.

So, again, Hilburn said...obviously, he was running for the phone. I told Hilburn where I found my phone, and I assume he went there. So I went back in. Now the doctors, Dr. Perry and Dr. ...oh, I forget the other man's name...it's been so long...were giving the information.

They said, at this point where I went in and started taking notes...one of them said that there was...

Oh, I remember. A question was, "Did you ever think you could save him?" He says, "There was never any doubt in my mind that it was a lethal wound." I remember that. Again, see, this is so long before the Zapruder films, anything where we know that...

Bowen: There was no chance.

Brooks: Oh, when his skull flew away in slow motion, he, of course, was dead--all the time. But they wanted a priest to get there. Anyway, that was one quote I remember.

And then another quote was, "Well, what was the time of death?" And he said, "There was so much confusion down there that we all consulted later and decided to pronounce him dead at 1300 hours," which was one o'clock.

Then another of our reporters...well, we had several in there. I said that I would go phone this information in, and I did. I got my same phone back. Of course, now that I wasn't...Hilburn had already given them the news that he was dead, and I was just adding what the doctors had said.

And so then I went back down to the first floor, and I saw Jack Bell of the Associated Press and the head of UPI, the one who won the Pulitzer for it. What was his name? I cannot remember.

Bowen: I don't remember.

Brooks: The famous UPI man who made the first bulletin. (He is referring to Merriman Smith. The name was remembered later.) Anyway, I recognized both of them from "Meet the Press." I mean, I knew who they were. One of them says, "I heard that Lyndon had a heart attack." And he says, "Oh, God!" He says, "Who's next in line?" And here I can't think. Well, I don't know. I did know, and I just went up to them, and I said, "McCormack." And they said, "That's right, McCormack."

Bowen: The speaker of the House.

Brooks: The speaker of the House, right. That's all I did. I just mentioned that to them. Oh, I had already been told next that...when I phoned in that information, they had told me for me to go to Market Hall and see what the story was over there. That was where Kennedy was on his way to to speak.

Bowen: This is the city editor or whoever was on the desk? Who was on the desk at that time?

Brooks: Afternoon paper? I just don't remember.

Bowen: It was the afternoon paper people who were still working on the story?

Brooks: Absolutely. But, I mean, so was the morning paper.

Bowen: Everybody.

Brooks: But we were still putting out the afternoon paper. As a

matter of fact, we continued publishing until six o'clock that night.

Bowen: Really?

Brooks: Yes. Anyway, they said I was to go to Market Hall. Well, no way I'm going to get back in Tony Record's car. Tony Record's not going to be there to drive me. But I just felt it was a day like no other, and it just would be a piece of cake. I stepped out into the street in front of Parkland Hospital and waved my hand, and two Dallas businessmen stopped. I said, "I'm a reporter. Will you take me to Market Hall?" And they said, "Sure."

Bowen: This was the street out in front of the main entrance?

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: They just happened to be driving by?

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: They weren't going to the hospital or anything like that?

Brooks: No. They just happened to be driving by. The street was full of moving traffic.

Bowen: It wasn't all clogged up then? Somebody pulled away or...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...stopped in front?

Brooks: Yes, yes.

Bowen: So they took you over there.

Brooks: To Market Hall.

Bowen: Market Hall.

Brooks: I got out and was now just looking for next day feature

stuff on what had happened. I didn't expect to phone back in anything about Market Hall. This was going to be for the morning paper.

Bowen: You had a reporter who was there, anyway, didn't you, of some kind? Or on the bus? He was on the bus, but that was supposed to go to Market Hall.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: And they had gone back to the hospital.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: But you got there late.

Brooks: Oh, yes, everybody had gone to the hospital by then. And...

Bowen: Did you have any trouble getting in?

Brooks: Market Hall? No, no. I was struck by the fact that just row after row after row of uneaten lunches...lunches that were there. And then I spotted lying on the floor, and picked it up, a souvenir that they say you can show your grandchildren--because it was so stark in its simplicity and said everything. It was a press badge that one of the reporters had lost off of his coat, and it said, "President Kennedy's Visit to Dallas November 22, 1963." So I stuck that in my pocket and kept it.

And then I poked around there for a long time and then went out and talked to some people on the street, and eventually, I guess, I got a cab. I don't remember how



I got there, but I took a cab to the...and by now, see, everybody who was still in contact with their desk had gone to the police station, where they had arrested Lee Harvey Oswald. But I was not sent there or anything so... I'm sure I phoned back in.

Bowen: From Market Hall?

Brooks: Oh, yes, probably. Undoubtedly from Market Hall. And they said that they had so many people now at the police station and everything that I could come on back if I wanted to. I said, "Okay."

Bowen: Then you had a problem of how to get back.

Brooks: Yes. But I had already decided that there was only one way to get back, and that was by the bus that ran between Dallas and Fort Worth.

Bowen: Yes.

Brooks: I don't remember how I got to the bus station. I don't remember whether I called a cab or not, but I guess I did because I don't recall flagging anybody else down in the street. I must have called a cab. Yes, I did because, otherwise, I wouldn't have known where the bus station was. Yes, sure. So the cab took me to the bus station, and then I rode the bus back to Fort Worth and went up to the office. I got back to the office...it was six o'clock.

Bowen: Had you eaten lunch before this happened?

Brooks: No, no, I hadn't. And when I got to...I'll tell you what

I did do that day. That was my first day of quitting smoking, and, of course, when I got to the first place I could, Market Hall probably, I bought a package of cigarettes and some matches.

Bowen: And that ended that.

Brooks: And that ended that. So when I came up to the city room, Jack Butler, the editor of the Star-Telegram, had sent out, and there were just tons of hamburgers all over the city room for everybody. I remember eating a hamburger, maybe two, and then walking over to my desk. Staring back at me was the unfinished column of Kennedy jokes that was never to see print.

Bowen: That must have been a shock, too.

Brooks: Well, I guess maybe that...what a...what a numbing thing to look at, and so I threw that out of my typewriter and sat down and for my Sunday column wrote basically what I just said here. That was the end of my Kennedy coverage, although it went on all night long and all Saturday and...

Bowen: Okay, you had to go back and then write your Sunday column...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...because you had to meet your deadline.

Brooks: Yes, right.

Bowen: Okay, when you finished that, then did you do like everybody else--go home and watch television?

Brooks: Oh, yes.

Bowen: Friday?

Brooks: Oh...

Bowen: Saturday...

Brooks: Absolutely.

Bowen: ...and so forth?

Brooks: Absolutely.

Bowen: Did you see Lee Harvey Oswald get shot on TV?

Brooks: Like, that Sunday my mother-in-law phoned and said, "Turn on the television! They just shot Oswald!" And I couldn't believe that, either. So I saw Oswald get shot on TV in the...

Bowen: Reruns.

Brooks: Reruns. I stayed with it for the entire time. We put out an extra that Sunday, where the Dallas papers didn't do that, and we sold them on the streets of Dallas.

Bowen: How interesting.

Brooks: Yes. Bill Hitch was the city editor of the morning paper, and he called in people and...and there not being any Sunday evening paper, you know.

Bowen: Yes.

Brooks: He got out the extra.

Bowen: The Lee Harvey Oswald story...when it first broke, Tony Slaughter has said it rang a bell for him of the Oswald name, and he vaguely remembered, you know, reading about him in the past.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: There was a Fort Worth past, and his mother lived here. Did that name ring a bell to you at all?

Brooks: Oh, no, not for me. I had never heard of Lee Harvey Oswald. But Slaughter had interviewed the mother during the defection, the Cuban period, and he remembered that. But in one of the all-time great coups that happened that day, Marguerite Oswald called the Star-Telegram to say that her son was arrested in Dallas and that she had no way to get there and could one of our reporters give her a ride to Dallas. Well, could we ever!

Bowen: (Chuckle)

Brooks: And the reporter that was still in the office and took her to Dallas was Bob Schieffer, who today, of course, is the anchorman on CBS. Bob Schieffer and Ed Johnson interviewed her all the way over on the Turnpike.

Bowen: This was Friday afternoon.

Brooks: Yes, Friday afternoon.

Bowen: They took her to the police station then?

Brooks: Yes, yes.

Bowen: So they heard about the story.

Brooks: Oh, yes. The Star-Telegram had Lee Harvey Oswald captured and the fact that he was a Fort Worth man in our Friday afternoon paper that we kept chasing on until six o'clock.

Bowen: Then you were really beating the Dallas papers...

Brooks: We beat...

Bowen: ...on an event that happened in Dallas.

Brooks: We beat the Dallas papers completely. The Dallas papers had a banner line saying that John F. Kennedy was shot and that they pronounced him dead. Then they picked up the story that had been running earlier about what had happened in Fort Worth. They had one story. Our whole front page was covered with five or six stories including the Marguerite Oswald story.

Bowen: You had a picture in your first edition of Jacqueline Kennedy, which was taken in Fort Worth, I believe. And she had kind of a veil or something and looked like she was in mourning. They replaced it later with a black-bordered picture of the president.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: But in that first extra edition...it looked as though the Star-Telegram got a picture of her...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...in mourning for the president.

Brooks: Yes. Well, of course, she was in the same dress all the way back to Washington, and in the same hat.

Bowen: Well, on Monday you didn't have any type of...

Brooks: No, no.

Bowen: ...assignment.

Brooks: I was...

Bowen: Was it your day off or what?

Brooks: No. I was just back to being the saloon editor (chuckle).  
In other words, we had everybody in the paper...

Bowen: Back to...

Brooks: Yes. So I wrote on Monday...well, somewhere along the line, I had...and I suppose I did it on Saturday. I came down and wrote my Monday morning column. Then on Monday my job...I would get out my Tuesday column. I think my Tuesday column was all about the radio/TV coverage and how Channel 5 had given their film to all of the networks and to Channel 11 even.

Bowen: I remember you wrote about...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...seeing the network news on Channel 11.

Brooks: Yes. Anyway, I'm going home Monday afternoon, and on the car radio...I lived on the east side of Fort Worth at that time. On the car radio...they weren't going to announce the Lee Harvey Oswald burial until after it had begun because they didn't want any mob scenes or incidents or anything like that. So I'm going out East Lancaster at the time that they say Lee Harvey Oswald is being buried now in Rose Hill Cemetery, which was only twelve, thirteen blocks from my house.

Well, it suddenly struck me that all my life I had heard about the John Wilkes Booth/Lincoln assassination

and its aftermath. And two days before or three days before, I had been in on a moment of history. And now the second part, the John Wilkes Booth part, if you will, was about to take place. I knew you couldn't get in that cemetery but, again, nothing ventured, nothing gained. I drove to the gates, and a policeman on duty knew me from the police reporting days, and he let me go in. So I went in and was...my remembrances of that day were that the grey weather had returned. You know, the sun came out briefly in Dallas that Friday or the bubble top would have been used.

Bowen: I think it had been raining a little in Fort Worth that Friday morning.

Brooks: It had been raining terribly because the people stood out in the rain to hear Kennedy speak.

Bowen: I was there. I remember.

Brooks: Yes. And the sun came out about the time they got on Air Force One to go back over to Dallas. But now the winter weather was back, and it was a bleak, grey day. They had pressed the reporters into duty as pallbearers because no one else wanted to do it. You just can't imagine what a hated figure that Lee Harvey Oswald was at this time. So I was struck by the fact that there... the next...they even had to get a preacher to volunteer to read the services. No one would, and this Reverend...

he was head of the Christian Churches Alliances or something...he had volunteered to do it because he felt that someone should. Of course, all he did was read passages, scripture. He certainly didn't praise the man or anything. I was struck by the fact that here were only three mourners in a...Marguerite Oswald and Marina and Robert Oswald, the brother...sitting there and with Marina's child on her lap.

Bowen: Were both children there?

Brooks: I don't remember two children. I really don't. So I guess they thought that the younger one was too young to be there. Perhaps there were two children there, but I just remember one. And so all along the line behind the burial site was a uniformed picket line of blue--policemen standing at parade rest--to keep anybody from coming there. There were a few people who had already been in the cemetery, putting flowers on graves and things like that, who were now locked in, but the police didn't want them to be a part of this...come up there. And that's why the police were there.

Bowen: This is Fort Worth police?

Brooks: Yes, yes, Fort Worth police. As a matter of fact, I can tell you where every Dallas policeman probably was at that moment--he was at Tippit's funeral. See, they held all three funerals on Monday--Washington, Dallas, and Fort Worth. Well, Tommy Thompson of Life magazine, who



later would write Celebrity and Blood and Money and everything like that, was there for Life. He and I had been childhood friends. As a matter of fact, Tommy, when I became the police reporter, came up to the Star-Telegram and asked them if he could write my teenage column. They turned him down and wouldn't give him a job. I told him later, "Tommy, you know, if you'd just gotten that job, well, today you might even be assistant managing editor."

Bowen: (Laughter)

Brooks: So he and I talked, and we watched as they lowered the coffin and stayed until it was filled. I don't know about you, but I...you know, at funerals people leave. I'd never have seen them fill a burial, which I know they do immediately afterwards. But, anyway, we stayed until that was done. Tommy has the scene in Celebrity, where he has Kleber being there. And later...I still have this, the Life magazine picture that was selected to be shown as they're shoveling in the dirt. Tommy and I are standing there in the background together. I've kept that for twenty years.

But, anyway, as I drove away and went home, I said that two things happened--two moments in history--and I was there both times. I was struck by that. I couldn't do that if I wasn't a newspaperman.

Bowen: You said it was a cold, a grey day...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...in the cemetery.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: Was it windy? Was it cold? Were the mourners huddled up against the cold or...

Brooks: No, it was just grey and bleak.

Bowen: Not a very cheerful day.

Brooks: Oh, no.

Bowen: There was only the three mourners plus the police and newspaper reporters at the scene.

Brooks: Yes. And the baby, the daughter, if not two daughters. But I really don't think two daughters were there.

Bowen: When you got there, had the funeral already started?

Brooks: They were just bringing the casket down from the...anyway, Jerry Flemmons and Ed Horn and Mike Cochran, I believe... Well, there were...

Bowen: Jon McConal.

Brooks: Bunky Jon McConal...were carrying the coffin.

Bowen: How did the family react to the...

Brooks: Marguerite Oswald was crying. Marina, I think, was crying, and Robert was not. But it was short, and... I think my most vivid memory of it is just that the preacher's voice was the only sound that could be heard except for the constant clicking of cameras.

Bowen: They were really on public view all the time?

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: They left before the coffin was filled.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: But you stayed,

Brooks: Yes, yes, yes. I stayed. I mean, I just felt an obligation to stay and just see that it was filled in.

Bowen: Since you were a part of the Kennedy assassination coverage and then saw the Oswald service, what were your thoughts when all the Warren Commission...when the report came out? Did you ever think that there might be a conspiracy? There was a lot of talk for a long time, and people still don't believe...

Brooks: I know that. All right, I'll answer your question, but I will also give you a preface because I've been asked before. My little contribution to this story has...my opinion is not worth anything because I wasn't all that much inside. Like everybody else, all I know is what I read. But with that preface, I will say that I never, never, never thought it was anything except the act of a single nut. And one of the main reasons that I think that is that if a man is fooling around and having an affair with another man's wife, you can't keep it a secret on the block. How could you possibly keep the crime of the century a secret after all of these years? No, I don't for a minute think there was any conspiracy.

Bowen: William Manchester gives the impression that he feels the same way, that it was strictly one man.

Brooks: Well, so did the Warren Commission, and so does everybody except a few assassination buffs.

Bowen: And Marguerite Oswald.

Brooks: Yes. I forget.

Bowen: She believed in it.

Brooks: I forget what she believed. I know that she kept in contact with me until the day she died, always writing me letters and things.

Bowen: What did she write you about?

Brooks: Oh, that her son was innocent, and that she had no way to make a living, and that she wanted to be paid for interviews, and that every November 22 people mourned Kennedy because they lost a president, and that no one seemed to remember that she had lost a son. Marguerite felt sorry for herself and was a very opportunistic woman about capitalizing on Lee Harvey Oswald.

Bowen: Supposedly, she wanted him buried at Arlington Cemetery.

Brooks: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was another thing. She wanted him buried at Arlington and...no, you have a mixture there of a mother's grief or...and the fact that it looked an awful lot like she was trying to capitalize for her own benefit.

Bowen: What would you do about her letters?

Brooks: Try to ignore them. I mean, you know, she was a pest. I ran into her up at Skaggs grocery store on the west side...oh, some months before her death. We talked at the time, and I just asked how she was doing. The subject of Lee Harvey Oswald didn't come up.

Bowen: Let me ask you one other thing that you may know about from your amusements column days. One of the criticisms of the Secret Service at the time was that they spent Thursday night in Fort Worth down at the Cellar.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: You knew Pat Kirkwood, I guess...

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: ...owner of the Cellar. What type of a place was the Cellar then? They didn't serve alcoholic beverages there, did they?

Brooks: No, but if you were a newspaperman or a Secret Service man, you got it.

Bowen: Supposedly some of them were there until three and four o'clock in the morning.

Brooks: Oh, yes, right.

Bowen: What type of place was it?

Brooks: Oh, it was a dive. I mean, it was a novelty dive where... it was a place where nice people went because it was such a novelty.

Bowen: A very hippie-type place.

Brooks: Oh, yes. They called them beatniks then. And the girls, the waitresses, wore scanty panties and "see through" bras. The music never abated. I never went to the Cellar, after being there a couple of times, for the simple reason that you could never hear yourself talk. I told Kirkwood that I just wanted to go with friends and talk across the table. There weren't even any tables. You sat on pillows.

Bowen: (Laughter) Did you ever meet Jack Ruby?

Brooks: No, no, never.

Bowen: He was really in a very fringe part of the amusements business that would not be covered by the newspapers, I would imagine.

Brooks: Oh, no, no. He was at the very top of the show business, and he was covered by the newspapers, but not me...Dallas newspapers.

Bowen: The Dallas papers.

Brooks: There was never any reason for me to cover one of Jack Ruby's strip joints.

Bowen: The morning of the Kennedy assassination the Dallas Morning News had that big letter, "Welcome, Mr. President," with all the hate-type things in it. Did you see it that morning?

Brooks: No, no. I saw that after the fact.

Bowen: After the fact.

Brooks: Yes. I didn't even read the Dallas papers...wouldn't have

read it that morning anymore than I would have any other morning.

Bowen: But you said that when you were going to Dallas, you felt the hatred of Dallas.

Brooks: I said I hated Dallas, is what I said. Of course, there had been stories in the paper about the LBJ and the Adlai Stevenson incidents and everything like that.

Bowen: Had you had any type of feelings that this was not a safe place for him to visit?

Brooks: Not in any...well, to that extent, you see, it was completely beyond comprehension in 1963 that a president of the United States could be assassinated. That's what happened in Europe. Then it became almost...you know, assassination in this country became...well, commonplace is too much of a word, but, I mean, it happened again and again and again and again.

Bowen: Martin Luther King, Bobby Kennedy.

Brooks: And to say nothing of George Lincoln Rockwell. Then the Ronald Reagan, Gerald Ford attempts. Gerald Ford twice. Ronald Reagan...I couldn't believe he was shot that day. Those things...no, it never occurred to me that that could happen.

Bowen: When did it all sink in that Kennedy had died and that this terrible thing had happened?

Brooks: Oh, I suppose from the minute that Malcolm Kilduff, who

was head of the White House press corps, had announced that he was dead. Oh...that was another thing. When I went back after Robert Hilburn went out to give the news and the doctors were through talking, Malcolm Kilduff stood up at the microphone and was talking to the White House press corps. He said, "Where do you want to go? What do you want to vote to go? Here or with the new president?" That sounded so funny. And to a person they voted to go with the new president, and they all went out and got on the...to go back to Washington.

Bowen: Do you think, for the most part, that the reporters put their emotions to the side until it was all over and just went on about the best way...

Brooks: Oh, yes.

Bowen: You said that Seth Hantor was crying.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: Or had tears in his eyes.

Brooks: But I'll guarantee you, he had quit being a professional reporter. All he was giving over the telephone...I mean, I can't speak for all of them, but I just know without knowing that they were giving information back on what they knew was the biggest story maybe of all time. I don't know. They weren't letting their emotions get in the way of saying "hated Dallas" or anything like that, I'm quite sure, because these were news stories being written. I



E R R A T U M : Page 46, line 18 should read: But I'll guarantee you, he hadn't  
quit being a professional reporter...

would say that, without a doubt, to a person, that no one was dictating any story. They were dictating notes to someone in New York or Fort Worth or Dallas who was writing the story. But there wouldn't be a way to let their own emotions get into it.

Bowen: Maybe not until they got home and sat down and looked at the television and...

Brooks: Oh, yes.

Bowen: ...let things sink in.

Brooks: Oh, yes, yes.

Bowen: When did you see your people again that you had gone over there to Dallas with? How did they all get back home?

Brooks: Well, Tony Record drove his own car back. Jack Tinsley stayed in Dallas all night long at the police station, and Mike Cochran stayed in Dallas.

Bowen: So you were the only one that took the bus back.

Brooks: Yes. I mean, as I say, I wasn't a member of the team. I wasn't a cityside reporter. I was just helping out.

Bowen: Yes.

Brooks: And having done that, they said, "Well, you can come on back. We've got..." By that time we must have had thirty people in Dallas, I guess.

Bowen: There was a story that the Star-Telegram ran, I guess a month or two after the assassination, explaining your coverage of it. They were talking about the reporter calling

back in and saying he was dead, and the people on the desk arguing with him: "How do you know?"

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: "An intern told me." "Well, how do you know for sure?"  
"Well, he wouldn't lie about a thing like this."

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: Were they very careful about what they would actually put in the paper, do you think? I mean, were they double-checking with two or three sources, AP plus their reporters, or were they going with AP?

Brooks: Well, no. We would go with our own reporters, not with the AP. But I'm not so sure of the fact that an intern told him that he was dead. I'm not so sure that that even got in until the official announcement. Then again, it might have. It might have. They might have said...the lead might...in one of those many, many chases...one of them might have said, "President Kennedy was shot, and a source at the hospital said that he was dead, but this could not be confirmed." But I'm guessing here because I didn't see all of the editions that came up.

Bowen: It took awhile for the...the full story...

Brooks: Oh, yes, yes.

Bowen: So many stories were coming in from all over the place.

Brooks: Yes.

Bowen: Did you ever see John Connally after this to talk to him

about it?

Brooks: Yes, John Connally the very next year...well, let's see... that was November. I don't know whether it was in 1964 or 1965 because I don't remember how long he was in the hospital. But in March he always comes to the Gridiron show we put on here and attends the cast party dinner afterwards. And at that cast party dinner, he got up and told us what happened to him that day and how he felt like a giant fist had slammed into him and how when he was lying in the jump seat or in the front seat...no, the jump seat with Nellie. When they got to the hospital, he just automatically raised up and got out of the way because he knew that they would want to get the president out first. We got a great quote...yes, I talked to him.

Bowen: He didn't really know about Kennedy's death for sure until the next day, did he?

Brooks: I think that he did in light of...well, no, no, I guess he didn't because one of the other things he said was that he was taken to this trauma room, and he said that everyone was wondering how to get his clothes off. He says, "Why don't you cut the clothes off?" And they said that they had special tools for that, used them all the time, but they just didn't feel that they could cut a governor's clothes off. So at that time, he didn't.

But on the twentieth anniversary, when I talked to

Julian Read again, he said that Nellie Connally said that she was covered with "matter," for want of a delicate word, from the president. So they're bound to have known that... well, no, they're not bound to have known the severity of that. They can figure he's still unconscious.

Bowen: Yes.

Brooks: No, I don't know. John Connally, in answer to your question, did not know that the president was dead because he was lifting himself up out of the...but I just feel from the Zapruder films and all that has been written that Jackie Kennedy certainly must have known it, if his skull was missing and...and that Nellie Connally must have felt it because of the "matter" that was on her.

Bowen: I've read that Jackie Kennedy would not let him out of the car until they could cover him, his head, with a coat and that she told them, "You know he's gone. It's not going to matter." She wouldn't let them just immediately get him out until...

Brooks: I had never heard that.

Bowen: ...someone put a coat...took off his jacket and put it over the president's head because she didn't want anybody to see.

Brooks: Well, I think that that's entirely logical and probable. But, no, I never heard that.

Bowen: Did you see the films?

Brooks: Yes. I wish I hadn't, but I did. I don't think that I

knew what I was going to see. I would have watched it because, as a police reporter, I've seen many people dead after the fact and mutilated, after the fact. But to see it happen in front of your eyes! I thought that when they put the Zapruder film on Channel 13 that time several years later that what I was going to see was that grainy film that we had all seen before, not zoom in with slow motion in which you actually saw his head come apart. Now that's pretty strong to see something like that in front of your eyes. So, yes, I've seen the Zapruder film.

Bowen: On the twentieth anniversary, there was a lot of publicity and things. Did that bring it all back to you? Did you go back over any of your notes or...

Brooks: I had...

Bowen: You wrote a column.

Brooks: Yes, I wrote four columns on it, but I had been planning to do that ever since 1983. I said I knew that it was coming up the next year. I was fully ready and knew what I was going to do. As a matter of fact, three of the four columns had appeared in the narrative form in my book, so it was all very much still fresh in my mind.

Bowen: You just had to read back over it.

Brooks: Yes, that's right. I didn't even have to read it back over because, just like I've been talking to you today, it's all still very vivid, and I remember it so well.

Bowen: One of those important times you don't forget.

Brooks: No, no way.

Bowen: Well, that exhausts my list of questions. Is there anything else that you wanted to say before we stop?

Brooks: Oh, one of the four columns might be a good way to end up. On the tenth anniversary, in 1973, I was still thinking about the fact of seeing that coffin and thinking about, well, who died at the time the president was being treated, and I called Parkland. I had a friend there, an official, and I said that I thought it might be interesting if I could find out who was born in Parkland Hospital at one o'clock p.m. on November 22 or the nearest to that--kind of a the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away thing--and where was this child now. Ten years old. Would be in the third grade. He doesn't know, or she doesn't know, that she was born or he was born at that time. The official said, "It may take a little doing." I called well in advance of the November...he says, "It will take a little doing, but I'll see what I can do." Well, he called me back in a couple of days, and he said, "I'm afraid you don't have a story." He said, "First of all, a baby wasn't born until many hours after that time." He said, "He was black, and he was a boy, but he was illegitimate." And he says, "I don't think that you would want to..." I said, "No, I wouldn't." I said, "Well, again, it was just an idea."

But I wrote a column saying that he's out there somewhere, and he doesn't know who he is, and I don't know who he is. And he'll never know who he is. But all I know is that...and this is on the tenth anniversary...in twenty-five years, he'll be old enough to run for president.

Bowen: But no one will know who he is.

Brooks: No one will ever know who he is.

Bowen: That's interesting.

Brooks: I mean, he won't know who he is. And I also pointed out that maybe five years ago he was killed chasing a bouncing ball into a street. Maybe he's not even alive. Isn't that something?

Bowen: Well, that's one of those things, nobody will ever really know. Just like a lot of things about the Kennedy assassination, I guess nobody will ever really know.

Well, Elston, I appreciate your taking the time, and it has been a long time, I know, to do this. It's really helpful, and I think it's important to people who want to read about the Kennedy assassination. Thank you very much.

Brooks: My pleasure. Thank you.