JFK assassination: On Sunday, collective memory from Central New York
It will be 50 years ago, next Friday, that President John F. Kennedy was shot to death in Dallas. Last month, I wrote a piece asking readers old enough to recall that day to share their reflections about what they were doing at the moment they learned the news.

The result was an outpouring of emails and letters, all containing vivid recollections. We've collected them into an archive, which we'll give to the Onondaga Historical Association and share with readers Sunday at syracuse.com. We'll also offer a sampling of those thoughts, in shortened form, in Sunday's Post-Standard.

Among the many notes we received was this one from Jane Sullivan, of Camillus, who recounts how she and her husband John received some of the best and worst news of their lives on the same day:

Following our wedding in July 1963, we lived in Washington, D.C. John was a senior at Georgetown Dental School and I was teaching in Rockville, Md. on that memorable Friday, Nov. 22.

The principal stopped me in the hallway on my way to pick up the class at the music room and told me what had happened in Dallas. She cautioned me to tell the children before dismissal so they wouldn't hear it on the street as most of them were "walkers". Many had parents who worked for the government, NIH, Bethesda Naval Hospital, etc., so this news was especially personal, bringing tears and questions that this young teacher couldn't answer.

Driving back into the District on Wisconsin Ave. that afternoon the mood was somber, everyone listening to the news on car radios. The GU Dental Clinic closed, as did most of the city and John was waiting for me in our little apartment watching TV, disbelieving what he was watching.

The hours and days that followed were full of images that are still so fresh. That first night we joined hundreds of others at the White House quietly mingling, watching for a light on the mansion's second floor. We heard sirens as we reached the west entrance and stopped to see the official limousine, tires screeching, turn into the driveway. Lyndon Johnson, now the President, was clearly visible through the window. In those pre-9/11 days, all that was possible.

On a cold, clear autumn day, we stood for hours with the silent crowds on Constitution Avenue, waiting for the sounds of the muffled drums, the sight of the flag-draped coffin on the horse-drawn caisson and the riderless horse with the backward-facing boots in the stirrups, symbolizing the fallen leader. By evening the long line up the stairs to the Capitol rotunda took John and I past the catafalque where Kennedy's body lay in state. On the way home we stopped at St. Matthew's Cathedral, where the funeral Mass was to take place. Workmen were busily
setting up scaffolding for TV cameras, wires, cables everywhere. We made time for a quick prayer for the President, for the country.

The next morning John remembered a good vantage point in front of the Mayflower Hotel, where we could watch the funeral procession as it left the White House on its way to St. Matthew's. There we stood and watched Kennedy's grieving widow and family as they walked behind the hearse and all of us grieving, with them. Following behind were heads of state, foreign dignitaries and leaders from around the world walking together as a group in no particular order: England's Prince Phillip, Haile Selassie of Ethiopia and towering above the others, French President, Charles DeGaulle.

These are some of our memories of those sad days and the events we witnessed as a young couple. We were caught up in the excitement of this new presidency and what its future might hold for us. That fateful Friday afternoon, amid the constant media coverage John had almost forgotten to tell me through our tears that he had picked up the test results at the hospital lab: it was positive. I was pregnant!

Today, our beautiful daughter, Kerry, born in July 1964 is our (one) joyous memory of November 22, 1963.