

## Upper School Boys Hear Former LIFE Bureau Chief Discuss Acquisition of Zapruder Film of JFK's Assassination

Richard B. "Dick" Stolley, Los Angeles bureau chief for LIFE magazine when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated 50 years ago on November 22, 1963, was a special guest speaker at Browning's Upper School assembly on November 20, thanks to the efforts of a Browning parent who is the chief executive for Hearst International. Mr. Stolley, author of "The Day Kennedy Died," spoke to the School community about his purchase on behalf of LIFE magazine of Abraham Zapruder's film of JFK's assassination. TIME notes that, five decades later, the Zapruder film is "one of the 20th century's indispensable historical records."

Mr. Stolley asked Head of Upper School Jim Reynolds to screen a documentary that explains the events from November 22, 1963, forward. After viewing the video (essentially an interview he gave during a summer school session for journalists at Yale University), Mr. Stolley entertained questions from the boys and their teachers.

The documentary begins with the fact that Mr. Stolley flew to Dallas immediately after the president was shot. As he was preparing to cover the assassination, he received a phone call from Patsy Swank, a Dallas-based LIFE freelancer. "The news she had was absolutely electrifying. She said that a businessman had taken an eight-millimeter camera out to Dealey Plaza and photographed the assassination. I said, 'What's his name?' She said, '[The reporter who told her the news] didn't spell it out, but I'll tell you how he pronounced it. It was *Zapruder*.' I picked up the Dallas phone book and literally ran my finger down the Zs, and it jumped out at me — the name spelled exactly the way Patsy had pronounced it. *Zapruder*, comma, *Abraham*."

Mr. Stolley contacted Mr. Zapruder, co-owner of a garment factory and 8-mm film buff, who invited him to come to his office the next morning. Because he arrived an hour early, Mr. Stolley was able to view the 26-second film at the same time Mr. Zapruder screened it for two Secret Service agents. He recalled that he and the agents, who actually saw the film three times that morning, reacted the same way: "as if we had been simultaneously gut-punched...I decided instantly: there is no way I am going to leave this office without that film."

Mr. Stolley described how he left the room while Mr. Zapruder showed other reporters the film. While he waited, he chatted with Lillian Rogers, Mr. Zapruder's assistant, about high school basketball; both were from Illinois and fans of the game. Mr. Zapruder then called him back into his office, telling the other reporters that Mr. Stolley was first to arrive and so he would speak to him first about print and broadcast rights to his film.

After promising him that LIFE would not exploit the film, he offered Mr. Zapruder \$50,000 for the print rights, the highest amount he was authorized to. With the other reporters banging on the door, Mr. Zapruder quietly told him, "Let's do it." After typing a brief contract then and there, Mr. Stolley took the film and left through the factory's back door. Days later, LIFE purchased the film and TV rights from Mr. Zapruder for another \$100,000.

Many years after Mr. Zapruder's death in 1970, Mr. Stolley spoke with his business partner, Erwin Schwartz, who asked him if he knew why he, rather than anyone else, was successful in obtaining the film all those years ago. The two discussed the fact while other reporters badgered Ms. Rogers, he had not, plus he promised that LIFE would not exploit the film. Then Mr. Schwartz asked the same question a second time, answering aloud without waiting for a reply: "Because you were a gentleman." Mr. Stolley told the Browning boys that he always dressed well, too. "I was in the right place at the right time, but I also did the right thing."

In his book Mr. Stolley writes, "I did call Mr. Zapruder up at one point and say 'Mr. Zapruder, I realize that you gave away all the copies of the film and LIFE magazine took the original.' I said, 'I don't think you've got a copy of the film; I'll send you one.' And I'll never forget his answer; he said, 'I do not want that film in my house.'" LIFE sold the film back to Mr. Zapruder's family for \$1 in 1975; the federal government bought the film from the family for \$16 million in 1999. Today this film and the camera that captured it belong to the National Archives. The camera is on display at the Newseum in Washington, D.C.

The senior editorial advisor of Time Inc., Mr. Stolley was appointed to the post in 1993 upon his retirement as Time Inc.'s editorial director, the second-highest editorial management position at the company. From 1995 to 1996, he also held a dual job as executive producer of "Extra," a Time Warner Co. daily syndicated television show. Mr. Stolley was a reporter, writer, bureau chief, senior editor and managing editor at Time since 1953. During his career, he served as assistant managing editor and managing editor of Life magazine, founding managing editor of People magazine, and director of special projects for Time Inc. Life and People magazines are sister publications of Time. In 1996, Stolley was named to the American Society of Magazine Editors newly inaugurated Hall of Fame.

—Melanie S. McMahan, *Director of Publications*