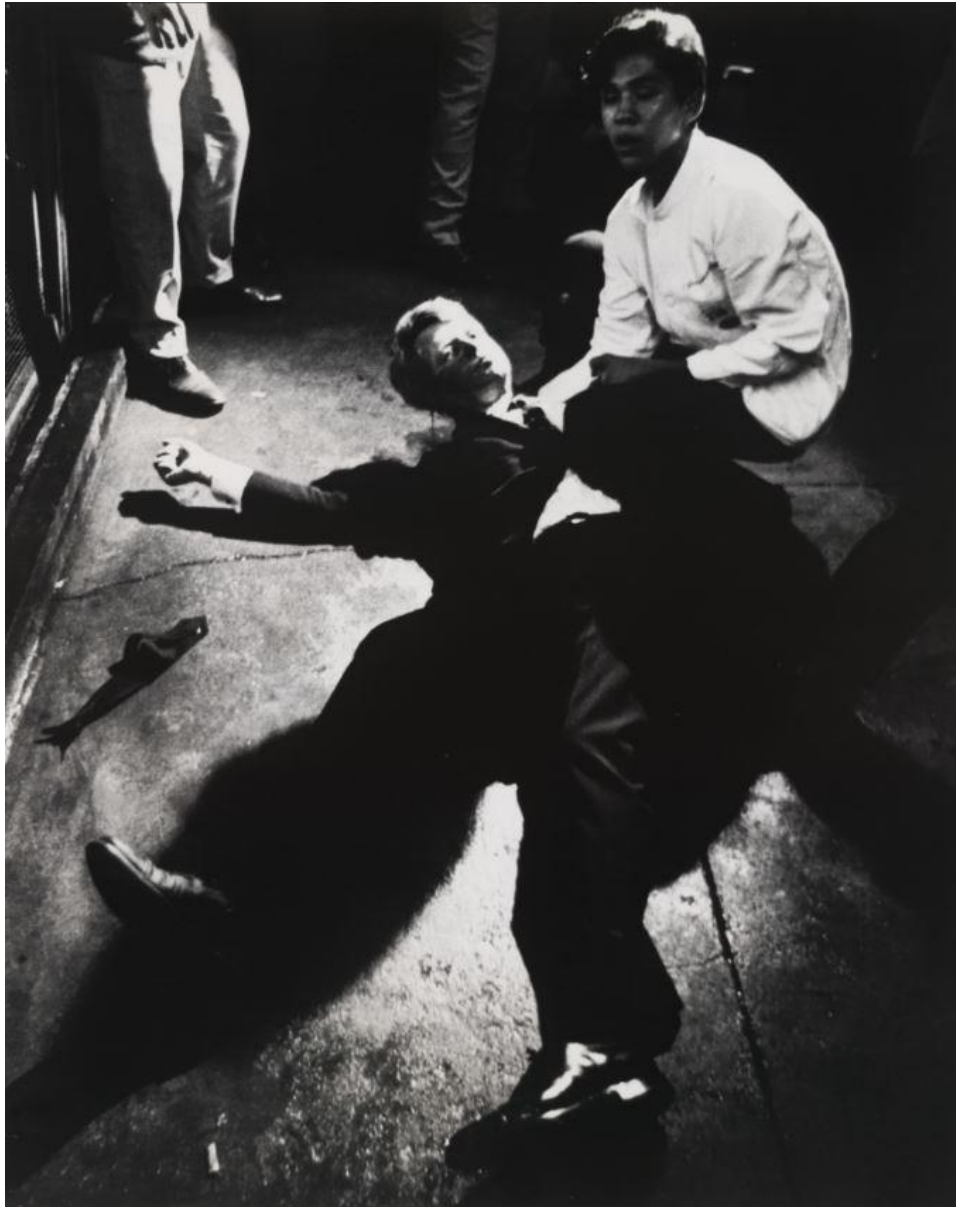


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Boris Yaro, *Robert F. Kennedy Shooting, Ambassador Hotel, Los Angeles, 1968*

The Picture | The Story

The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy

I didn't start out to make a photo of an assassination; I just wanted to make a photo of Bobby Kennedy for my wall.

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I had left work early that evening because I had eaten too many tacos. I call our assignment desk and told them of my upset stomach, the editor I talk to, Walt Taylor, said to go home. "You won't get anything else in the paper tonight" he said. He was referring to the fact that it was election night and most space was being dedicated to that.

I went home and took some Pepto Bismol which settled my stomach and shortly I was watching the California Primary returns on television!

When it became apparent that Kennedy was winning, I decided to go to the Ambassador and try to get a photo of RFK.

Upon arriving at the hotel, I went to the designated Press Room only to find it deserted. Everyone had left to hear RFK's acceptance speech.

As I walked toward the Embassy Ballroom, I had to pass through a semi-darkened pantry area. There for the first time, I saw RFK as he came in from the kitchen. He moved quickly and because I didn't have a flash unit, I was unable to get a photo.

So, I followed the crowd in the Embassy Room and listened to RFK's Victory Speech.

As he finished, I ran back in to the Pantry area in anticipation of his returning the same way. Once there, I met Richard Drew of the Pasadena Star News who was a friend.

When RFK came into the pantry, I raised my camera and waited. Within a few seconds, Drew said "Hey Boris, you missed him." RFK had been screened out by someone else.

So, I jumped off of the freezer I had been sitting on and dashed over to the right to get ahead of RFK.

As I mentioned, it was dark in there. I was at a loss because I didn't bring a flash with me. I wanted a "natural light" pix.

I had my own personal camera, a Nikon FTN and a 28 mm lens. I didn't own a flash unit that would fit on this camera.

When RFK stopped to shake the hand of some hotel employees, I moved towards him.

Suddenly several small "firecracker-like" explosions rang out. In fact, I thought they were firecrackers. Some debris hit my face. This was consistent with the firecrackers I had played with as a child.

All of a sudden, the crowd near RFK pulled back and I saw a man with a revolver firing the gun at him.

I stood frozen as the assailant emptied his weapon. When he stopped, I heard a voice say, "get him," and several men grabbed him and pushed him down on metal countertop (or freezer top). As the gunman struggled, I saw his weapon come out of his hand. He tried to grab it back. I ducked under the

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arm of one of the men holding the gunman and picked up the revolver. I remember thinking the grip was very warm.

I turned away from the men holding the gunman and almost instantly someone took the gun from me.

I turned back in time to see RFK start to sink to the floor. Part of the room was now lit by a TV camera. As the senator lay on the floor he was joined by a busboy. At this time, I set my camera to 30th of a second and opened my lens to F 8.5 and made 3 photos. At the time, a woman grabbed my coat sleeve and began tugging all the while shouting, "DON'T TAKE PICTURES" and "I'M A PHOTOGRAPHER AND I'M NOT TAKING PICTURES." I pulled my arm back, freeing myself from her grasp and yelled, "Goddammit, Lady. This is history."



Boris Yaro, *Robert F. Kennedy Shooting (close-up)*, Los Angeles, 1968

Now several people were crowded around RFK and I had to move in close to make 3 more photos. I suddenly remembered a conversation I'd had with a Times photographer assigned to cover the election.

He said the paper was delaying its deadline to accommodate RFK's Victory Speech.

I then ran back to the Press Room to call our city desk. However, I could not get an outside line.

I left the pantry, making my way toward the 8th Street exit when I spotted a payphone.

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I called the city desk and told them of the shooting. I said, "I have photos."

Bill Thomas (the City Editor) said, "Get em down here!"

So I ran to my car and drove to the Times where the shooting negatives were developed (by Safelight – I said it was very dark) and I was then debriefed by Reporter Dick Main.

- Boris Yaro

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