

WALTER CRONKITE – IMAGE #26

John Lennon, the former Beatle star performer and native of Liverpool, England, was in good spirits on the morning of December 8, 1980. After a five-year break from music and the public eye, Lennon and his wife, Yoko Ono, were in the process of making a comeback with their album, *Double Fantasy*. But sadly, his life would be tragically cut short before the end of that day.

At 11 a.m. EST Annie Liebovitz, a photographer for *Rolling Stone Magazine*, arrived at Lennon's apartment in New York City for a photo shoot. One hour later Paul Goresh, a friend of Lennon, standing outside that apartment building, called the Dakota, began to make small talk with a stranger whom he had encountered there three minutes earlier. The 25 year-old stranger, Mark David Chapman, was holding a copy of *Double Fantasy*. Chapman told Goresh that he was from Hawaii and was awaiting Lennon's exit from the building in the hope of securing an autograph from the rock star.

At 12:40 p.m. EST employees from San Francisco's RKO Radio, including famed radio personality Dave Sholin, arrived at the Dakota for an interview with Lennon to promote his new album. A smiling Lennon did a little jump in the air and welcomed his radio guests by saying: "Well, here I am, folks, the show's ready to begin!" He spoke candidly about the lost revolutionary focus of the 1960s and his advocacy for world peace and feminism. At the end of the interview Lennon remarked: "I consider that my work won't be finished until I'm dead and buried and I hope that's a long, long time."

At 4:30 p.m. EST Lennon and Ono exited the Dakota with the RKO Radio crew and were awaiting a ride to take them to the Record Plant studio in Midtown Manhattan, where they planned to work on a new single, "Walking on Thin Ice." During this time, Chapman, with his copy of *Double Fantasy* still in hand, approached Lennon and extended the album. When the former Beatle asked the stranger if he wanted him to sign it, Chapman nodded timidly. Standing nearby with his camera, Goresh took a couple of photos of the two men. The RKO limo arrived shortly thereafter, and Sholin offered to give Lennon and Ono a ride to the studio. The couple accepted the offer and went to the Record Plant.

Over six hours later, at 10:50 p.m. EST, Lennon and Ono returned home in their limo. After exiting the vehicle onto the West 72nd Street sidewalk, Lennon made eye contact with the awkward young man whom he had met earlier in the day. This time, however, Chapman, with his now-signed album in hand, was after more than an autograph. Within seconds he pulled out a .38 handgun and fired five shots at the musician – hitting him four times in the back and the chest. Somehow, Lennon managed to continue walking. Eventually he collapsed in the front vestibule of the Dakota. Scattered around him were several cassettes that he had been holding. Terrified, Yoko Ono entered the Dakota screaming, "John's been shot!" Seconds later, building worker Jay Hastings alerted the police. Officer Steve Spiro arrived at the scene within minutes. Lennon was taken to Roosevelt Hospital near Central Park on 59th Street.

Doctors in the Roosevelt emergency room spent several frantic minutes trying to save Lennon. The head physician, however, approached Ono and informed her that the medical staff was unable to resuscitate her husband. John Lennon was officially pronounced dead at 11:15 p.m. EST on December 8th, 1980. His wife was hysterical for several minutes afterward, refusing to accept what she had been told. After regaining her composure, Ono asked everyone to wait to announce the news publicly so that she could first tell their son, Sean.

Howard Cosell of ABC Sports was the first to break the news that Lennon had died, when he interrupted a *Monday Night Football* game between the New England Patriots and the Miami Dolphins. Cosell also announced that a special edition of *Nightline* would air 30 minutes after the game to provide additional information on the death of the famous musician.

Meanwhile, police had taken Chapman into custody peaceably after finding him reading a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* at the site of the shooting. At the time of his arrest the assassin said, "I'm sure the large part of me is Holden Caulfield, who is the main person in the book. The small part of me must be the Devil." Later under interrogation, Chapman stated that the book, *John Lennon: One Day at a Time*, by Anthony Fawcett, was the conclusive catalyst for the assassination. Chapman, a onetime Beatles' fan, was incensed by what he saw as the hypocrisy of his former idol, who had preached simplicity, peace, and love and yet lived a life of unparalleled luxury in New York City. Chapman's obsession and jealousy had grown to the point that he had decided to travel to New York and kill Lennon.

Within minutes of the news announcements of Lennon's death, crowds began to assemble both at the Dakota and Roosevelt Hospital. Fearing reprisals from enraged fans, police kept Chapman under close guard during psychiatric evaluations and court appearances. Otherwise, they kept him at the high security jail on Riker's Island.

A worldwide outpouring of grief and tribute followed Lennon's assassination. It culminated in a 10-minute silent vigil on December 14th, 1980, when about 100,000 people gathered in New York's Central Park while tens of thousands of others came together in cities around the world.

Chapman pled guilty to killing Lennon and received a sentence of 20 years to life in prison. Since that time, Chapman has been denied parole seven times. He remains at Wende Correctional Facility in western New York state.

When asked about Chapman, Yoko Ono has stated, "I don't even want to think about him, and I usually don't. Because it's so irrelevant who pulled the trigger. That was not what was relevant. The fact that John is gone is what we're living with."