

Crowds of Lennon Fans Gather Quickly at the Dakota and Hospital

A crowd began to gather at West 72d Street and Central Park West immediately after John Lennon, the former

Beatles star, was shot and killed last night. Some of the first people to gather were eyewitnesses to the murder. Others had been only a block away.

By midnight, the crowd of mostly young people at that corner outside the Dakota, where Mr. Lennon lived with his family, had grown to several hundred, and by 1 A.M. it grew to nearly 1,000.

Many were crying and they were all asking questions about the shooting. Some said that they had come to the scene from other boroughs and others said that they had come from surrounding communities.

Some Crying, Some Silent

A similar crowd of friends and fans also began to congregate outside Roosevelt Hospital, where Mr. Lennon died shortly before midnight. That crowd quickly grew to several hundred persons, with some crying and many standing mute.

Many of the spectators said that they had heard about the shooting on the radio and had immediately driven their cars to the hospital, where they filled the sidewalks and the streets.

Luis Fonseca, a Queens resident who was in his car in Brooklyn when he heard the news, drove directly to the hospital to join the vigil.

"I know I'm not going to see him," he said, "but we used to listen to him all the time as kids and I just wanted to be here."

As he sang part of his favorite Beatles song, "Imagine," to a reporter, a hand reached out and shook his hand. "Yes, 'Imagine' is one of the best," said Richard Townson, a 23-year-old tourist from England.

"I came to be with him," Mr. Townson said. "To be able to tell my grandchildren about this night. He needs his countrymen here."

His roommate, Jack Gooten, also a Briton visiting from London, said: "His music brought me up. He was the king of the 60's. It's going to be another loss like Shakespeare now that we have lost Lennon."

Outside the Dakota, there were a number of young families. The parents had apparently been fans of the Beatles before their children were born.

Under the entrance to the hospital, near an unlighted Christmas tree, some who wept openly were wearing sunglasses.

As the evening wore on to about 1 A.M., more and more police officers showed up to help keep the crowd orderly because ambulances kept coming in and out.

A 55-year-old man who gave his name only as "Jim," said: "My daughter admired him very much. She lives in the suburbs. She couldn't be here tonight and I wanted to come to do what I could in terms of a prayer."

'Always Hoping to Meet Him'

"She always carried around John Lennon for President buttons and a John Lennon comb," he said, "and was always hoping to meet him outside the Dakota apartments."

At the Dakota, the scene resembled a pilgrimage, with cars double-parked as young men, some of them on roller skates, and women, some in slippers and housecoats, stood on the street.

Some of the people were singing and humming the lyrics of "All My Loving" in soft voices.

"Tomorrow I'll miss you / remember I'll always be true / and while I'm away / I'll write home ever day" Then people in the crowd joined in and sang out, "And I'll send all my loving to you."

Soon the crowd was chanting, "All we are saying is give peace a chance,"

a line from another of John Lennon's songs.

Occasional couples, either standing or sitting on the sidewalk, held each other in long, silent embraces.

All the way down 72d Street, from Central Park West to Columbus Avenue, there were small groups of people standing in doorways and on front steps.

'Talked About Good Things'

Scott Williams stood alone, as if at attention, directly across from the Dakota's driveway. He had a guitar case slung over his shoulder, and tears gleamed in his eyes.

"I feel like he was a relative," he said. "I was at work when I heard, and I came by to pay my regards. He left us some truly great messages. All are one — he said that."

"He wrote a lot about love, he didn't give death any energy, he only talked about the good things. We'll miss him, but somehow it seems he hasn't gone far away."

A Quietly Placed Flag

Some people raised peace signs as antiwar demonstrators had done in the 1960's. Some lighted matches and their lighters and then they solemnly held them in the air.

And across the street, somebody had quietly placed a small American flag inside one of the crevices of the building.

In Palm Beach, Fla., where the Lenons also had a home, Terry Conway, the property manager, said: "I'm stunned. This is a tragedy. It's just too much to take in."