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# 'I knew I must record it for the world'

The pictures in last week's issue showing what happened in the first fateful seconds after the shooting of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. were taken by a young photographer named Joseph Louw who was only a few feet away when the shot was fired. A native of South Africa, Louw was working with Dr. King on a documentary film for the Public Broadcast Laboratory, where he is an associate producer. Over the past few months, we too have been working with PBL as this new non-profit organization experiments with ways to improve the quality and content of serious television. On several occasions PBL has made use of LIFE stories—most notably Gordon Parks's essay on a poverty-stricken Negro family in Harlem—to supplement its own reporting.

As soon as he had taken the historic pictures, Louw began to worry about getting his film out of Memphis, which was a chaos of rioting and burning. He called Av Weston, PBL's executive director in New York, for advice. Weston, in turn, called us to see what we could do. We went to work, but Louw got free on his own and caught a midnight plane to Newark. We looked at his film at 6 a.m. Friday—and rushed it into the magazine.



JOSEPH LOUW

Pure chance put Louw at the scene of the shooting. He was eating dinner in a restaurant when, "for some weird reason," he remembers, "I suddenly decided to go and watch the Huntley-Brinkley show." He went back to his room, which was three doors from Dr. King's. Minutes later the shot was fired. He rushed out on the balcony immediately—without his cameras—and saw Dr. King fall. He ran to help, then, seeing there was nothing he could do, ran back for his cameras. "At first," he remembers, "it was just a matter of realizing the horror of the thing. Then I knew I must record it for the world to see."

Joe Louw was born in Kimberley, South Africa and, like Dr. King, learned about racial prejudice as he grew up. "My first camera was a Kodak Brownie No. 2," he says. "I saved painfully to get it. The first person I ever photographed was my mother. She was in a doorway looking at me sort of askance, as though to say, 'Don't point that thing at me.'" Joe was 12 at the time.

He went through secondary school in South Africa, then went to work as a cub reporter and photographer. Five years ago, when he was awarded a scholarship to Columbia University, he left Africa and came to the United States. He felt he already had friends here. "I was born in an obscure little town, but I already knew about Jesse Owens and Joe Louis. I had also fallen in love with Lena Horne and I knew about the work of Gordon Parks and Langston Hughes. I didn't think of them as Americans. Just as heroes."

Joe went through undergraduate school at Columbia, majoring in economics, then studied journalism there. He was hired by PBL a year ago, and started work on the King documentary in January. On the evening of Dr. King's murder, Joe shot four rolls of film, then rushed to a friend's studio to develop them. His hands were shaking. "I remember the last stage of developing," he says. "It was the longest 10 minutes of my life. The first picture I looked at was Dr. King lying behind the railing. I never did photograph him full in the face. I felt I had to keep my distance and respect."

*George P. Hunt*  
GEORGE P. HUNT,  
Managing Editor



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