

DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING IS DEAD

I remember the evening Dr. King died.
Most details are gone, like words written on a sandy beach.
But this remains – this will always remain.

I was asleep at 6:01 pm.
A full-time police clerk by night, full-time college student by day.
Ate my big meal by 2.
In bed by 3 or 4.
Off to work at 10.

Got there at shift change.
Lots of cops milling around ...
All armed,
A tough bunch,
not your modern TV cop ... to be sure -
Those going off
Those coming on
It was Unnerstahl who announced it.
Stood on the rung of the booking desk stool:

KING'S DEAD – SHOT DEAD IN MEMPHIS

At first, silence - Just a second or two.
Then cheers.
I was shocked.
Then the blast.
A shotgun fired three feet in front of me.
Plaster and dust flew from the hole in the station house ceiling.

Silence again.
All eyes turned to Byrd.
He was angry.
He turned and was gone.

Shift change happened.
Tensions rose.
Fires burned.
Another story, for another day.