

Commission Exhibit No. 460

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OSWALD

by Ruth Paine

I have not been able to look in the face the idea that if I had led my life differently President Kennedy might be alive. Perhaps most people whose lives touch the matter have a host of 'if only' thoughts. Mine will be with me forever.

If only I had known that Lee Oswald had hidden a rifle in my garage. If only I had appraised this man as someone able to do such terrible violence. If only the job that I helped him find hadn't put him in a building along the President's route. If only, quite by accident, I had done or not done a dozen things, the country might have been spared the tragedy, and Marina Oswald, whom I love as if she were a sister, would not have been turned into an assassin's wife.

I have to wonder whether my inclination to look for good in all people interfered with my seeing Lee clearly. Just three days before the assassination I learned that Lee was using a false name in his room in Dallas. In the light of this new knowledge, I questioned how much truth there was in anything he told me. What sort of man was this beyond the confines of my home, where he was simply Marina's husband and Junie's father?

I wondered whether he could be, in fact, sent by the Russian government to work as an agent here. I thought not. He was neither bright enough nor organized enough, I felt, to be given such an assignment. I really thought that even if he had volunteered

his services to the Russians. I couldn't accept, or
were fools.

I had told the FBI what I know about him, and realized that they would know a great deal more than anybody else. I felt that I didn't have to worry about whether Lee was a spy or wanted to be one. The high caliber of the FBI men I met made me feel secure. They may have some 'if only' thought, too, but I am still convinced that if anybody could have anticipated the danger these men would have.

I first met Lee and Marina at a small party in Dallas about a year ago. The host invited me because he knew I was interested in learning the Russian language well enough to teach it. Lee told me about his experiences in the Soviet Union, where he met and married Marina. He talked to a clutch of people around him for perhaps an hour, but I missed half of it because I spent time getting acquainted with the kitchen crowd. He talked about the censoring of his mail. He realized after he got home that his brother had sent some letters that never reached him. He said all mail from foreign countries addressed anywhere in the U.S.S.R. must go first to a Moscow office for reading.

I wasn't sure as he talked whether he was dissatisfied with the Soviet system or simply wanted to make it clear to his listeners that he was not blind to its defects. He did say that he had gone there because he thought their system superior to ours, and while there he tried to renounce his citizenship. But our Embassy refused

to surrender his passport to the Soviet government, a fact which made it possible for him to come back to this country with his wife and their child.

I saw little of Marina the first part of the party. She was trying to get June, their one-year-old, to sleep. She explained that she didn't like to leave June with a baby-sitter. She was wearing slacks which, if anything, emphasized how slight her build is. She weighs about 110 pounds. I remember wondering whether it was possible that she was expecting a child again, though how it occurred to me I can't imagine. Perhaps it was because, although she said she liked beer, she refused a drink. She had quit smoking when she was expecting June. She always put her children first.

I got her address and wrote asking if I could come and visit some time. She wrote back, and I went to see her with my two children. Lynn was then three, Christopher two. We took all three children for a walk in the park near their apartment. She was very pleased that her June felt comfortable. The child was often frightened by strangers, but when I came she took to my children and their toys, and hardly noticed me.

In spite of my faulty Russian, I found Marina easy to talk to and very personable. Our conversation almost always had to do with home and family. Neither of us care much for politics. She told me that she was, as I had guessed, expecting a new baby in October. But she didn't want me to tell it around. I realized that she must have very few friends in whom to confide. After all, it was our first real talk together.

We visited two or three other times, and began to confide as friends. She said that a while ago her husband had told her to go back to the Soviet Union. I didn't know whether this was said in anger or a quarrel or was something he seriously wanted her to do. She had written to the Soviet Embassy to inquire about going back. When they wrote to ask why, she just didn't reply. She dropped the subject. She liked the United States. She hoped to learn enough of the language to become a part of the life here, and to get a job.

Her husband refused to speak English to her. It may be that he wanted to be certain of keeping his Russian up, but she argued with him the importance of her learning English. I couldn't help but feel that he wished to keep her dependent on him. It just seemed unfair for such a nice person to be in a helpless position, and unable to stay here. I thought about this a good deal over the next few days, and determined to offer my home to her as an alternative to going back to the Soviet Union.

Next time I saw them he had lost his job in Dallas--he did advertising layouts for a photo-engraving shop--and couldn't find another. On her suggestion, he decided to try for work in the city of his birth, New Orleans. His things were all packed in suitcases and U.S. Marine duffle bags. Maybe the rifle was in one of the duffles, I don't know. I delivered him and the whole pile to the bus station downtown.

Marina and June came to stay with me. Then if he found work, I said I would drive them to New Orleans in my '55 Chevy station

wagon. A long night bus trip seemed to me a rather hard thing for a pregnant woman with a small child. So she came home with me that day, April 24th. We brought along their playpen, the baby bed and a few kitchen utensils. I remember we both were glad that these large pieces would travel by car rather than commercial transport.

In the next two weeks, I often wished my facility in her language let me talk freely. She'd have to explain her jokes, even though she got mine easily enough. One day Chris and June were squabbling over a toy and I commented: "Soviet-American cultural exchange." She laughed and said, "Don't say it."

We didn't use the dictionary much. She was remarkably patient about communicating in simple terms and gestures. We only looked up hard-to-explain ideas like pin-worms. Yes, my little girl had them, the doctor said, and you can imagine my embarrassment. Here I had invited a mother and baby to my house to be infected. I was blue. But she laughed and assured me that pin-worms are just something that happen. All five of us took the cure.

Marina had been born in Archangel in 1941. She was still an only child when her father was killed in the war. Her mother re-married and had another daughter and a son. Then she, too, died after fighting cancer very hard because her young children needed her. Marina moved off to an uncle's home in Minsk, where she met an American, Lee Oswald, at a social club in the medical institute. He was very nervous six weeks later when he came to ask her uncle's permission to marry. Her family feared he might be a spy. The newlyweds soon applied for her visa to the United States, but had to wait a year for it.

Marina has a strong sense of pride and independence. She had trained and worked as a pharmacist in Russia. She wanted to get a job here when her English was better and the babies a little older. She never was quite comfortable accepting bed and board from me, and I never succeeded in convincing her of the value to me of having her live with me. How many struggling language students are lucky enough to have a resident (non-paid) tutor?

On the night of May 8th, Lee called to say, Hurrah! he had a job. We left next day for New Orleans, two women, three children and piles of paraphernalia. We stopped often for Seven-Up and diaper changes. When we got there next afternoon, Saturday, Lee took proprietary pride in showing us the apartment he had rented. It was on Magazine Street, a house cut up into apartments and furnished with local period pieces. Old and ugly. The cockroaches were in firm possession of the premises, and Lee's heavy bombardments of bug spray only brought them out fighting. Marina was less enchanted than he had hoped. She confided to me that she wanted some day to have her own furniture, modern things to her taste.

They bickered for the next two days. Petty things it seemed to me. I thought my presence added to the strain, so I took off Sunday afternoon with my children for a quiet trolley ride. When Lee went to work, Marina and I took all the children to Ponchartraine Beach. That was good fun. But it was with relief that I headed home Tuesday.

Back at my own quiet life in Irving, a suburb west of Dallas, I soon got a distressing letter. Marina might yet have to go back

to Russia. "What a pity!" she wrote. I invited her to come live with me at any time. She asked an alternative to being shipped back. No answer came from her for a long time. I worried. From the Quakers in Dallas, I got the name of a woman in our church in New Orleans. I telephoned and asked her to look in on the Oswalds. But all my fears were groundless. Marina soon wrote that all was well, and she'd been to a doctor for a pre-natal checkup.

In August I drove to Philadelphia and Cape Cod to visit friends and relatives. Marina had some of my addresses, so I learned that Lee had again lost his job. But, she said, their spirits were good and they were quarrelling less.

I drove home by way of New York and to see them and suggest, as I had already done by letter, that she come stay with me the last month before the new baby's birth and while she gained back her strength. Lee agreed. He seemed relieved that his wife would be with somebody who could translate for her and make arrangements at a hospital. I could see that he cared for his wife and her welfare. Before that, I'd seen only that he liked to order her around and insisted on having the last word. When his vocabulary was outstripped by hers, he would shut off an argument with a curt "malchi!" -- Shut up. I thought him very impolite.

But in New Orleans, for the first time, I felt sympathy for Lee as a husband and a father. He liked to play with Junie. Marina said that his love of his daughter was the strongest tie in their marriage. When he'd come into the apartment with an armload of groceries, he'd announce himself by calling out to them: "Devochki!"

-- Girls! When time came for the trip to Dallas, he was very helpful packing up. He looked very bleak when he kissed his girls goodbye.

Marina, very pregnant and with June on her lap, perked up when we crossed the state line. "Back in Texas!" she cheered. "You might not know I think of it as my home, but I do."

Ten days later, on October 4th, Lee called to say that he had been in Dallas for a few days, had found a room and was looking for a job. In New Orleans he had told us that he was going to job-hunt in Houston; however, the papers reported after the assassination that he had actually gone to Mexico at that time to apply for a visa to visit the Cubans. He deliberately misled his wife and me.

On the phone that day, he must have asked Marina if I would pick him up downtown. I heard her say no, because I had just come from giving a pint of blood in Parkland Hospital. That's the hospital where both the President and Lee were soon to die. We had applied there for pre-natal care, with aid from county welfare, because they could not afford "the full cost." The doctors had been kind and thorough. Since maternity patients might need blood transfusions, they asked each if some friend would donate two pints of blood for the bank. (I'll donate Marina's second pint in a few weeks.) Anyway, Lee hitch-hiked out to the house that day. He looked clean and spindly and soon caught a ride. When the man learned he was going to see his wife and child after two weeks away, he took Lee right to our door.

He spent the weekend at my house, and came again the next weekend (October 12 and 13). He liked football, and I realized how nice it was for a man to simply sit and watch television and be available

for the children to play with. Some things he didn't like. We sometimes have a Quaker grace at dinner. We hold hands around the table and each says his silent prayer. We did that once when Lee was there, and he issued a silence that was no prayer. In spite of his attitude on religion, Marina had taken June to the Russian Orthodox church in Dallas to be baptized. She had herself been baptized as a child, and raised partly by her very orthodox grandmother.

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Lee talked religion and politics to my husband Michael, who remembers the conversation. All religions were the same to him, and all were part of the power structure's method of maintaining its control. He got his answers out of Marx, and he simply recited them from the book, an old book. He could argue only when he could find a parallel in his Bible, Marx, to what I had to say. He used a supercilious tone when he felt good; otherwise, he was sour and scornful.

The capitalist system, he said, is built on the exploitation of men by men for a profit, which he contended to be the cardinal sin. He felt himself personally exploited by his employer; this was the only area in which he mentioned a grudge to me. Of course, I contrasted the efficient, unprofitable manager who can pay only the minimum wage with the efficient, unprofitable manager who can pay more. The real wage goes up. He would declare that in Communism the decision on a man's pay is made by a manager who does not stand to profit from the decision. He could not present evidence to support his idea, as other people do, but would merely re-assert his original thesis.

He thought himself a moral person, but his range of values were very limited. He didn't even gather the idea of the Bill of Rights. I took him to an ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) meeting, and it was startling to him that ACLU's interest in human rights is without ulterior motive. He couldn't join that organization, he said, because it isn't a political action group. (He did, nastily enough, join it about two weeks before the assassination.)

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He was looking, I'm sure, for other Marxists to be with. He said he hadn't found any Russian Communists before he left the country, and he didn't seem to have found any who would talk to him after he came back.

"In our arguments I told Lee that all the civilized values I hold dear are diminished or lost by acts of violence. But he held such human values in contempt, the same contempt in which he held most human beings."

Michael feels that Oswald became the President's assassin because he suddenly found himself with the opportunity to affect the course of history. He got his job at the Texas School Book Depository quite by chance. On Monday morning, October 15, Marina and I were having coffee with a neighbor. We mentioned that Lee had been unable to find work. He had just received his last unemployment check, smaller than usual because it covered the last fraction of his eligibility. The baby was due any day, and they were pretty desperate. My neighbor said that her younger brother was working in the Texas School Book Depository and thought there might be an opening. We told Lee about it when he phoned that night. He applied, and was accepted. He seemed very happy indeed. He came out the next Friday and we celebrated both the job and his twenty-fourth birthday.

That Sunday night, October 20th, Marina went into labor. I took her to the hospital while Lee stayed with the children. He could not drive. When I left Marina at the labor room, she asked me to pray for her. She gave birth to Rachel very soon, at 10:41.

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The birth was normal, and she came home with Rachel a day and a half later -- which seemed very fast to me.

We had a busy first week. She was pleased when the neighborhood children came shyly and asked if they could see her new baby. Marina commented that people here are much more free to lend and give than they are in the Soviet Union. She thought Americans very generous. In Russia, she said, you couldn't just go out and buy clothes when you wanted to. There is not the feeling that what you need is always available, so people tend to hold what they have closer to them.

She noticed, too, that I didn't lock my doors. The front lock didn't even work. She said how glad she was to see people live with a feeling of trust toward one another.

My trust in the world comes from a lifetime of experience in our country. She was much less confident than I on the day an FBI agent came to the house to see me. I assumed he wanted to see Lee. The FBI has to follow the activities of a good many two-bit Communists, and I was certain they kept themselves informed on Lee's whereabouts. This visit, however, was addressed to Marina, not Lee. Part of the activity of the FBI is to protect former residents of Communist countries from blackmail and other pressures. The agent was there to invite Marina to ask their protection if threats were made to her.

It distressed me to see how he expected people to be against him. His presence, and the attitude he brought, never did wear well. It was the first time I had talked personally with an FBI

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agent, and my already great respect for the agency went up. We discussed the difficulty in a free society of politely watching people with queer, possibly dangerous ideas. Unlike public opinion or a congressional committee, the FBI never even mentions an individual in public until they have evidence that will stand up in court. I never felt so proud to pay my taxes, and to live in this country as after talking with the FBI man.

We hardly realize the freedom we have here. Marina told me that in the USSR you have to register in a town as soon as you get there. All lodging and meals are assigned by the government. What you read is siphoned through a narrow channel of censorship. Here we live in freedom and trust the FBI to protect us.

It distressed me to see how Lee expected people to be against him. His presence, and the attitude he brought, never did wear well. Lee thought the FBI was trying to intimidate him. He came out each weekend, and on Veteran's Day weekend had four days at home. Marina felt also that it was too long, and asked him not to come the next weekend, and the one before the assassination. He called just about every day, so we had never used the telephone number he had left us for calling his room in Dallas. But on Monday, November 18th, Marina happened to notice Junie playing with the telephone dial and got the idea of calling him. At her suggestion I dialed the number he had given me. The man who answered didn't know a Lee Oswald. I asked if I'd reached the right number, and if it was a rooming house. The answers were yes. I hung up in bewilderment.

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Lee called next day and bawled out Marina for trying to reach him. He told her then that he was living under a different name, and demanded that she cross out the telephone number in my book. She was very disturbed. "Imagine asking a thing like that!" she said to me. It was not the first time, she said, that she had been caught "between two fires," between loyalty to her husband and her belief that deception is never necessary or right. He didn't call the next day. "I guess he thinks he's punishing me," she said.

He came out late Thursday afternoon, the day before the President was due in Dallas. It was the first time he had come to my home without asking permission. Marina worried that he had not called to see if it were all right, and I re-assured her. Both of us took the visit as his way of making up for Tuesday's anger over the telephone. We had supper as usual, and he went to bed early.

I went out to the garage to paint some blocks for the children. I noticed that the light was on and judged that he'd been there to get something out of the things they stored in the garage. I walked all around getting the paint, but didn't notice anything unusual.

Friday morning I woke about 7:30. The house was so silent that I wondered if he'd overslept and would be late to work. But in the kitchen I found a coffee cup that had been used. I immediately turned on the television, as I wanted to see President Kennedy in Ft. Worth and Dallas, and I knew that Marina would want

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To see him, too, I left the set on for her when I took Lynn to an early dentist's appointment. When I got home she thanked me for leaving the TV on. She had nursed Rachel about 6:30 while Lee dressed for work, she said, and then gone back to sleep. Next time she woke up she was in a bad humor, but the thrill and excitement of Kennedy's arrival at the airport had made her feel fine.

We were on the sofa in the living room watching the television set when they announced that the President had been shot. I translated to her that the President had been wounded in the head. We waited for further word, and the lunch I had been preparing sat on the table untouched. I lit some plain candles. She asked if that were a way of praying, and I told her yes, it was my private way. When the news came that the President was dead, I told her and we wept together. She said what a terrible thing it is for Mrs. Kennedy, how sad for her two children to grow up without a father.

We were there in front of the TV when a knock came on the door. It was six men from the sheriff's office and the police department. They told me that they had Lee in custody, and that he was charged with killing a police officer (Officer J. D. Tippit, who had stopped him near his rooming house in Dallas.) They didn't have a search warrant but I told them to go ahead. I said most of the Oswalds' things were in the garage, and she and I went with them to look.

They asked if Lee had any weapons, and I translated the

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question to Marina. She told me, to my shock, that she had known he had a rifle, and that two weeks ago she had seen what she thought was the butt of the rifle wrapped up in a blanket on my garage floor. I stood on that blanket roll and translated to the officers what Marina said. I felt that the rifle must still be there. But when they picked up the blanket, it was quite limp. It was then I realized how strongly the evidence pointed to Lee as the killer of the President.

The police wanted us to come to the station for questioning. They were getting anxious about time, and didn't permit Marina to change her clothes. While I went to get a baby-sitter, they filled the trunks of two cars with things out of my house. Every scrap of paper the Oswalds had, and my filing cases of old correspondence and 78 rpm phonograph records. They packed us off to the police station. It was my first ride in a police car.

At the police station, I learned with relief that they had a Russian translator. I just couldn't gather my thoughts in Russian. Marina noticed that my Russian had suddenly become no good at all. I gave the police a statement on whatever they asked that I could answer.

When they typed it up for me to sign, they got impatient over my efforts to correct the grammar.

Mrs. Oswald, Lee's mother, came to the police station. She had heard his name on her car radio while driving to her practical nursing job in Ft. Worth. At that time, Marina didn't know where Lee's mother lived, and hadn't been able to get word to her of the

new baby's birth. Lee was in that way, but Marina said "a mother is a mother."

We got home about nine-thirty, ate hamburgers and put the children to bed. Marina said she couldn't imagine that Lee had anything against President Kennedy. She liked him, she explained, and most of what she knew about him was the things Lee translated to her from the news on television. She thought that he would have expressed his feelings in some way. But she said little else. She had to go to work the next day, so she borrowed my hair-dryer, took a shower and washed her hair.

Marina Oswald left my house the next morning, Saturday. The police took her into custody, in part for her own safety. She called once, just after Lee was shot and before he died. For the next few days my home became one of the centers in the tragic storm let loose by the murder of the President. Reporters, police, FBI, Secret Service men, and sheriff's deputies came or phoned all day. Through some of these men, I sent word to Marina that I hoped she would come back again to stay with me if she wished to.

Other Americans expressed their concern for Marina and her difficult situation. One man said, "I was writing out a check for Mrs. Tippit, the policeman's widow, and my wife said to me, 'will anyone think about Mrs. Oswald and her babies?'" A Baptist minister's wife called. Please let Marina know, she said, that we are a Christian country and do not condemn her. Calls came from all over America, and letters offering sympathy, support and contributions. People in Kansas, California, Texas, Pennsylvania and

Ohio invited her to live with them.

I suggested to people that while her finances were desperate, her feelings must be even more so. Perhaps the most helpful thing would be personal messages to show that they understand her plight and continue to welcome her in this country.

This tragedy has smashed the private world in which two mothers, Marina and I, concerned ourselves with diapers and dishes. But we are still the same two people, who must go through each day the light it gives. I hope she can forgive me for adding to the invasion of her privacy. I want the nation to know what an innocent, fine person she is. If only I can somehow do this, perhaps she can bring up her fatherless children in a place where they don't have to lock the front door at night.