

# Ruby's Chicago Acquaintances Depict Him as

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CHICAGO, Dec. 14—Jack

(Sparky) Ruby, the fawning small-time quick-buck hustler who made the big time after a fashion by killing the accused assassin of President Kennedy, is being explained by perplexed friends who knew him when as the victim of an underprivileged youth.

"When" means the grimy depression years in the old West Side ghetto area, now a Negro district. Insecure, vain, sensitive to racial slurs, young Ruby lived by his wits but despite a glib tongue those who remember say he didn't have enough of them.

His chief talent was a desire to ingratiate himself with people, and if there is any simple explanation for his murder of Lee H. Oswald to be gained from a reconstruction of his early years it is, his former associates believe, that he wanted, in a tragically mistaken way, to ingratiate himself with society at large.

Policemen, night club promoters, waste paper yard proprietors, and businessmen who knew him then recalled him as an aggressive ticket scalper, hawk of novelty items at sporting events and the 1933 Chicago World's Fair, a ladie's man who picked up girls in bars with a polite line. They called him a "rounder," meaning a man who gets around.

But they recalled little about his family history. "In those days in that neighborhood you didn't go into a friend's house. You did, the mother would say. Get those bums out of here with their shmutsks fees (dirty feet). If you wanted to see him, you would yell outside, 'Hey, Sparky.'"

## Were in Foster Home

Only the three brothers and the four sisters of the Rubenstein family—the original name—could fill in the gaps. But aside from defending Ruby's patriotism, they have told reporters little.

However, from old court records it appears that the children were placed in a foster home through the Jewish Foundling Society between July, 1923, and April, 1925.

There is no record where young Jake Rubenstein, as he was then called, went to school, but friends believe that he attended Shepard Elementary School and dropped out of John Marshall High School after two years.

Reportedly, he was suspended for a week once for gambling on the playground, but the school board could not locate records of that period.

Thomas Howard, Ruby's Dal-

las lawyer, said the parents, Fannie and Joseph, a carpenter by trade, were divorced. They were immigrants from Russia. Earl Ruby, a brother, said both were dead.

In 1937 when Fannie Rubenstein, then age 62, was confined at Elgin State Hospital, a social report listed her as married but separated and said Joseph had left the home.

Hyman Rubenstein, a 61-year-old brother who retained the original name, requested the commitment under a routine form that described his mother as "an insane person." Examining doctors described the mother as suffering a "paranoid condition" and also "senile deterioration, paranoid state."

Court and hospital records are slightly at odds, but the mother was apparently released on trial in October, 1937, returned in January, 1938, and finally discharged "as improved" in May, 1938. Two sisters were taking care of her then. They were listed as Mrs. Anna Volperte and Miss Marian Rubenstein.

The mother's occupation was listed as "housewife" and also as "fancy work," indicating she made money sewing.

## Brother Is in Chicago

The first name of the children vary in records over the years. At the time of the foster-home placement the names of Jake, Hyman, Sam and Isadore, and Anna, Mary, Eva and Ida appear.

Hyman Rubenstein today lives in an old red brick six-unit apartment house on the far North Side of Chicago near Lake Michigan. On his mail box are the names of Mrs. Anne Volpert, believed to be a widow, Marion and N. N. Carroll and Eva Grant. The Victory Products Company is also listed on the mail box. Another sister, Mrs. Harold Kaminsky lives in Northwest Chicago. Sam Ruby is believed to live in Dallas.

The Eva Grant on the mail box presumably is the sister with whom he was associated in Dallas.

The Victory Products Company is unknown in Chicago business circles, but it is believed to deal in some sort of novelties.

Not long ago Ruby sent Hyman Rubenstein a "twist board" a cheap device with a fulcrum arrangement, suggesting it could be merchandised here. The idea is that it helps the user learn how to do the twist.

From his early years Ruby has peddled things.

He apparently never had a specific job or professional ambition, but as a hustler he gained a neighborhood reputation as an industrious and duti-



Associated Press

Jack Ruby

ful son who had time to play street softball only after supper.

He sold "sheets" (newspapers), scalped tickets, hawked food, pennants, programs and similar stuff around boxing arenas, ball parks and Stagg Field, where the University of Chicago used to play Big Ten football. "A kid that worked when other kids didn't work," a friend of his adolescent period said. "He sold anything to make a living. He didn't have a father then."

## Frequented Ball Parks

A retired policeman said at age 15 Ruby frequented ball parks and made friends with the cops. "He was good-natured. You had to like him, and I closed my eyes to some of the things he did. I would tell him, 'Take a walk' and he would say, 'I've got to get rid of these tickets to take some money home.' He seemed to be a home boy." He hung around street corners and went to dances at the Paradise Ballroom. He stole potatoes and fruit from pushcarts, but this was normal in the time and place.

"They were depression years, things were a little rough," another policeman who grew up in the neighborhood said. "He was always figuring an angle. He'd buy a lot of junk and when he didn't sell it he would feel terrible."

This man recalled him as "a deep-thinking kid, a brooding type of guy who liked to argue about a point."

One event he "hustled" was the 1932 Democratic convention in Chicago when Franklin D.

Roosevelt was nominated. Roosevelt became his hero.

"He thought F. D. R. did a lot for the Jews," a night club promoter, who knew him then, said.

Ruby reportedly changed his name legally from Rubenstein in 1957. He was known as a "clean dresser" from those years on. In his twenties, a friend remembers, he became positively narcissist. When he shaved he would use a hand mirror to get his sideburns exactly even. He seemed to take half an hour to comb his hair, which he was afraid he was losing too quickly.

When he was near a mirror he grimaced to show his teeth. Then he would polish them with a finger. He would watch himself in a mirror while talking to friends, constantly smoothing his hair.

His friends said he didn't smoke or drink then and frequented the Skyline Athletic Club, now defunct, a 12-floor establishment on Randolph Street, where he played basketball and handball and worked out every day. It was open to both men and women.

## Called Even-Tempered

This year when he was 52 years old, he still worked out with bar bells almost daily at the Dallas Y.M.C.A.

He was ruled by his emotions more than by his head, it is said, yet the reputation he gained as a slugger and which figured in the early accounts after the Oswald shooting surprised some of his Chicago friends—or so they are saying now.

"He was a square," a night club figure said.

One, who said he knew him well, declared Ruby never lost his temper, talked in a low voice and tried to use big words.

Another said, however, that he would "get mad—he was always trying to prove it to you," meaning he was fond of argument.

He apparently could take care of himself in a fight, however. If he dropped names of hoodlums at the time, his friends now insist that he really didn't have any connection with the crime syndicate. They said he never carried a gun until he went to Dallas.

A Chicago lawyer, however, said that Ruby came to him and posed as somebody with knowledge of the underworld. The lawyer said he referred Ruby to Rudolph Halley of the Kefauver Senate Crime Investigating Committee.

Three-and-a-half years ago when he returned for a visit Ruby said he had a gun and a permit to carry it. He told people here that "everybody carried a gun in Dallas" and that he needed a permit to

# the Victim of Stunted Adolescence

his money and as a protection against unruly guests at his joints who became abusive about his Jewish background.

He told friends that the tip of one of his fingers was bitten off in such a fracas.

## Tried to Help Friends

In 1957 he came back to Chicago for a visit with "Sugar Daddy," a 12-year-old Negro boy who sang and danced, an act he was unable successfully to promote. He said he was supporting the boy's parents and had legal sanction to act as his guardian. This is cited now as evidence of his good heart.

"He liked to ingratiate himself with people. He was always worrying about somebody who couldn't get tickets for a show or a fight," a friend said. "When guys went to Dallas he would get them hotel rooms, anything they wanted."

Friends said "Sparky was big with broads." He would meet girls by going into a bar "and trying to get lucky," as one friend put it. He had the reputation of treating "the worst tramp like a lady," this man said.

In 1937 he helped organize what is now called the Waste Material Handlers Federal Union, which was expelled in 1957 from the American Federation and Congress of Industrial Organizations during the corruption purge. One of his associates in this effort, Leon R. Cooke, was shot dead several years later.

For reasons still unclear, Ruby was unable to hold a job in the union after Paul Dorfman got control of the union in 1940. A waste paper company executive recalled that Ruby was "highly nervous, highly trenchant and wanted to strike right away."

Ruby knew Nathan Gumbin, a wealthy businessman who had dealings with the union in the time he was with it. Ruby spent time near a gambling place Gumbin frequented. Gumbin was killed in gangland style in 1948.

About 1940, Jack Ruby went to San Francisco where he reportedly lived with a sister, presumably Mrs. Grant, who was divorced subsequently, in 1945. He got to the Coast by driving a car that somebody wanted delivered in San Francisco.

Ruby worked in a subscription canvassing crew for The Call-Bulletin.

A night club owner said

"Ruby was a nobody" and who scalped tickets and sold expensive-looking but cheap watches and furs to night club girls at what were supposed to be wholesale prices.

San Francisco acquaintances recall that he and his sister lived in an area known for prostitution, strip joints and cheap bars.

He is without a police record in either Chicago or San Francisco.

## War Record Is Cited

According to one unsubstantiated report, he had to leave San Francisco for Chicago in a hurry soon after World War I because he received a death threat while running a crooked punchboard racket.

Ruby was, and is, a bachelor and prided himself on his physical fitness, but he was not drafted in Chicago until May, 1943. A vaudevillian, Jack Kelley, who said he once worked for Ruby, has been quoted as saying Ruby wore a hearing aid to avoid the draft.

His military career in the Army Air Force as an airplane and engine mechanic was, according to records, drab. He was honorably discharged with the rank of private first class in February, 1946, after serving at a series of camps in this country.

He was at Kessler Field, Miss.; Seymour Johnson Field, S. C., where he qualified as a sharpshooter with a carbine, at Blueenthal Field, N. C., Chatham Field, Ga., and Drew Field, Fla.

There is nothing in his record showing disciplinary action and he got the good conduct ribbon as did millions of others. He was adept at getting three-day passes, and his family became convinced he set some sort of military record in this context. He also had the gift of making friends with officers and would bring them home on visits. He wore his uniform with the same sense of sharp style he wore mufti.

In the postwar period he and his brothers, Earl and Hymen, set up a business to manufacture salt and pepper shakers made of pewter because other metals were still scarce. Friends said he had no gift for bookkeeping, so did the selling to jobbers.

Apparently there was a falling out among the brothers, although this seems to be in most respects a very close Orthodox Jewish family.

Earl Ruby said last week

Detroit Times-Democrat operated a novelty company in Chicago until cheap Japanese imports put him out of business. Earl, who moved to Detroit two years ago, said that Jack Ruby worked for the Spartan Novelty Company before he went to Dallas to help Mrs. Eva Grant run a "small night club."

Ruby's old associates here said they had little knowledge of his subsequent Dallas career, although they would, from time to time, refer such Dallas-bounding friends or job hunting night club performers to him. One Dallas friend said he was in Dallas just after he killed Oswald.

Reports that he was once friendly with minor Chicago gangsters who hung around his joint could not be verified here.

Ruby's Dallas record of petty charges since 1949 is another thing that Chicago friends said they were in the dark about.

A veteran Chicago policeman said:

"I remember him as noseey and loud. He could raise his voice and make a lot of noise. He was aggressive for a fast buck, a kid that wanted to be seen. But he helped his mother, brothers and sisters. He had a lot of charity in his heart and would go out of his way to help others. I don't think he was a crook."