

PAUL COATES

There Are Many Roads to Riches

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Catch me in an unguarded moment, and I just might blurt out that a boy's best friend is his mother.

But I've got to watch that sort of thing. It doesn't pay to let sweet sentiment interfere with duty.

Wednesday, I reported here that Mrs. Marguerite Oswald, best friend of Lee Harvey Oswald, was defending him by making the astonishing claim that he acted in a conspiracy with the United States Secret Service. The President's murder was a 'mercy killing,' she told McCall's magazine, because he was suffering from an incurable disease.

It was, I thought, the pitiful, frenzied desperation of a woman willing to try anything to clear her son's name. But I've had some second thoughts about the lady since then.

She also told McCall's: "Here is Mrs. Kennedy, a very wealthy woman, Mrs. Tippett, a very wealthy woman, and Marina is very wealthy, and here I'm wondering where my next meal is coming from . . . And yet I am the mother; but has anyone come forward to reimburse me for my emotional stability? No, and I have given of myself, I have given of my time and my voice, and I have \$2,300 to my name."

Home a Merchandise Mart

Maybe Old Mother Hubbard was willing to stare at an empty cupboard, but not this mamma. Mrs. Oswald, I have just learned, has turned her Fort Worth home into a little merchandise mart, where she wheels and deals in the personal effects her son left behind.

Several months ago, she called the New York firm of Charles Hamilton, Inc., collectors of autographs and historic documents, and asked what some of her me-

mentoos would bring at auction. An executive of the company flew to Fort Worth, negotiated with her, and the auction will be held next week at the Gotham Hotel.

I've just seen a catalogue listing the items and the suggested bidding prices. It would warm your heart to read it.

In an uncommon display of motherly devotion, Mrs. Oswald is putting her son's baptismal certificate on the block for \$200 or whatever the traffic will bear. There is a diploma authorizing Lee Oswald's promotion from elementary school to junior high school and a later one promoting him to high school. "Unusual relics, both in fine condition," the catalogue promises. And you can pick up the pair for about \$100.

For \$250 there is a grab-bag of "original" gifts Oswald sent his mother from Russia. It includes: "colorful tin tea box, soft wool scarf, white cotton scarf, four ornate linen table napkins . . . These napkins handmade by Oswald's Russian wife as a gift for Marguerite Oswald."

There's a greeting card with the message: "Have a wonderful Easter mother," and signed, "Love, Lee." There is young Oswald's copy of "Christmas Carols" (\$100).

Letter Price Set at \$1,000

And there are numerous letters to his mother, including one with the suggested price of \$1,000.

"Mrs. Oswald phoned about that letter yesterday," Hamilton told me. "She argued that the Warren Commission had never seen it and that, therefore, it was of great value. She told me we shouldn't let it go for less than a fortune."

"Is it worth more than you thought at first?" I asked.

"Hard to say," Hamilton replied. "It's a curious thing about this business, but the autographs of Presidential assassins generally bring much more than the letters and documents of the men they murdered."

There are 17 letters and personal items of Oswald's in that auction. I asked Hamilton if Mamma Oswald had anything left to sell. "I believe she still has some of his clothing," he said, "and she hinted she might put them up for sale."

Well, all it proves is that, if you've got a good head on your shoulders, there's always some way to make a buck in this world.