

Requiem for the 'Three' Rubys

To the very end, there seemed to be three Jack Rubys.

One was the avenger, the role Ruby claimed for himself, the instrument of fate who walked into the Dallas City Jail and killed Lee Harvey Oswald, President Kennedy's accused assassin, because, as Ruby later told the Warren Commission, "the emotional feeling came within me that someone owed this debt to our beloved President." To hear him tell it he was the tortured, bewildered Ruby who at one moment said he shot Oswald "to show the world that Jews have guts," at another insisted that only the blindest sort of chance—a traffic jam—brought him to the Dallas jail in the first place, and at yet another declared that he performed his nationally televised murder because Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy had to be spared the anguish of testifying at Oswald's trial.

A second Ruby was the dark conspirator conceived by people who found it impossible to believe that a tragedy of the scope and consequence of the Kennedy assassination could be explained as the aberrant act of one man. In their view, not only was the evidence pointing to Oswald as the lone killer inconclusive, the assassination itself was so improbable that it demanded a more devious scenario. Thus the questions were raised: Did Ruby and Oswald know each other? How did Ruby penetrate the Dallas jail? Did Ruby seal Oswald to seal his lips and prevent him from exposing the full scope of the assassination conspiracy?

The third Ruby was the ruthless, unprincipled strip-joint owner who emerged from the various investigations into his life, a man with a compulsive need for notoriety. He entered the police station unaided, had never known Oswald, and was acting alone when he called him, the Warren Commission said. More than a dozen members of the Commission and its staff were interviewed recently, and all said they still stand by that conclusion.

Ruby was convicted of Oswald's slaying, but saggy and other court proceedings followed and a few weeks ago, ill with cancer, he was taken to a Dallas hospital. Last Tuesday, a massive blood clot formed in his lungs, and all three Rubys died.