

Never Noteworthy in Life, Ruby Spotlited in Death

Jack Ruby committed a deed so foul that it clouds history.

It was not atypical of his life that he should cause such concern. What was unusual was that he should play such an important role.

For Jack Ruby, life had more than its everyday problems.

Ruby, the sixth of nine children, always was an outsider. From his boyhood as a street fighter, in Chicago's Little Sicily, an unsatisfied love life and eventually to his painfully rejected years in Dallas, Jack Ruby was alone.

He was alone on the morning of Nov. 24, 1963, when he killed Lee Harvey Oswald; he was alone in that dim jail cell in which he lived for three years.

And he was alone Tuesday morning when he finally succumbed to a horrible cancer that had engulfed his body.

Ruby's crime was more than a simple murder. When he shot and killed Lee Harvey Oswald, he eliminated the only solid link with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Only Oswald could have told the whole story.

Did he act alone? Was he influenced? Why did he kill the President?

In the recording of time, men always will have questions on the assassination, despite the comprehensive and documented Warren Commission Report which generally is accepted as the final and true authority. Oswald possibly could have answered those questions.

Jack Ruby was born March 25, 1911, in Chicago, in a flat on what was then Johnson Street. His family's name was Rubenstein. In 1947, like other members of his family, he had it changed to Ruby.

Ruby grew up a tough guy. A Jew had to be tough to survive in the ghettos of Chicago. He and his eight brothers and sisters were born to Joseph Rubenstein, a carpenter from Sokolow, Poland. A daughter, Jeanette, died in 1909 after being scalded in a kitchen accident.

They called him 'Jake' at Smith Elementary School. His sister, Mrs. Eva Grant, now of Dallas, called him "Sparkplug" after a horse in a comic strip.

Before he dropped out of school in the eighth grade, Sparkplug had been shortened to "Sparky."

The Ruby parents were not close and their family was even more widely separated. When Sparky was 12 — that was 1923 — they separated, and he and the other children were placed in foster homes.

During his childhood, Ruby was never near his faith. He didn't have a bar mitzvah. Later, however, friends said he became more devoted and it was reported that he told a policeman that he killed Oswald to prove that "Jews have guts." This never was verified.

As a boy in the slums, Sparky came to idolize fighters, especially boxers. He grew especially close to a Golden Gloves champ named Barney Ross.

In 1964, Ross, former world welterweight and lightweight champ, came to Dallas to testify as a defense witness on Ruby's behalf.

Sparky made bets, scalped tickets and "guarded" parked cars at Chicago's stadiums — all for a price. Later he went to San Francisco and sold subscriptions for The Examiner. He was successful, and is said to have made enough money to court a girl from a refined family.

The affair didn't work out. Ruby once told a jail visitor, "Her mother couldn't see me. She broke it up."

Ruby never married. There were always plenty of girls around his Dallas nightclub, the Carousel Club, but he never managed to woo any of them although he made good friends with a few.

On the day he killed Oswald, he walked to the Dallas police station from the nearby Western Union office where he had wired a striptease dancer who had worked for him \$25 because she had run out of money.

In 1937, Ruby returned to Chi-

cago. Ruby hung around Chicago and tried to organize a union of junkyard workers, then was expelled from the AFL-CIO during a corruption purge in 1938.

Ruby was drafted during World War II and trained as a mechanic. He qualified as a sharpshooter with a carbine.

Discharged in 1946, he turned up in Dallas the next year. Ruby and his sister Eva ran a nightclub named the Silver Spur on South Ervay Street. It was succeeded by the Club Vegas. The Carousel followed.

Ruby kept in good physical shape and cheerfully did his own bouncing of troublemakers. Once he hit a man so hard it broke bones in his right hand. Despite his rowdy activities, he stayed clean with the law. He had no serious police record until he killed Oswald.

He didn't permit Jewish jokes and didn't allow comics to ridicule his heroes, Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy.

Ruby was deeply disturbed by the assassination, and Melvin Belli, his chief counsel at his murder trial, tried to prove that he "blacked out" at the time he shot Oswald due to a rare disorder called psychomotor epilepsy. Expert witnesses however, could not agree whether such a disorder even existed.

After six weeks of trial, the jury ruled that he was guilty of murder with malice and sentenced him to death.

That was March 14, 1966.

On Oct. 5, 1966, the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals reversed the conviction, ruling that a policeman's testimony that Ruby told him he had planned the killing should not have been permitted. The court also said the trial should have been moved from Dallas because of publicity about the case and the public feeling generated by the shooting of Oswald.

A new trial had been scheduled tentatively to start next month in Wichita Falls.

On Dec. 9, Ruby was admitted to Parkland Hospital and the entire state of affairs changed.

It was at first thought that he was suffering from pneumonia, and an early medical statement from the hospital shortly after he was admitted

indicated he had chest congestion.

But his sister Eva refused to believe it.

"He looked terrible, like a corpse," she said. "For three weeks he's been deathly sick."

The next day, Parkland doctors announced that cancer had been found in a lymph node. Later, the tumor was found in the lungs and the lining of his chest cavity. Surgery was ruled out and his only hope lay in treatment by drugs.

That, too, failed.