

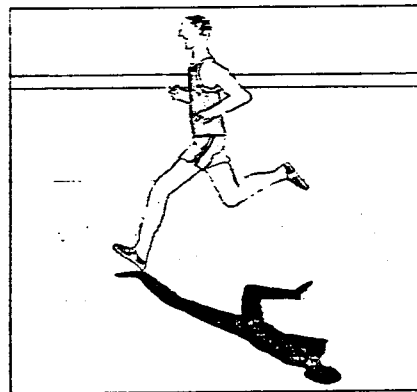
38
The Mind of the Marathoner
 By William P. Morgan
 Your average jogger whiles away the miles by reciting poetry or musing on the past. World-class runners use a different, safer method: keeping in touch with their bodies.

50
The Most Controversial Freudian Since Freud
 By Stuart Schneiderman
 "On the European continent today," says one of his students, "Jacques Lacan is psychoanalysis." But to the psychoanalytic establishment, he's been persona non grata for 25 years.

60
Marijuana as Medicine: A Progress Report
 By Sidney Cohen
 Bureaucratic constraints make testing marijuana difficult, but there are promising lines of research.

74
What Religious Revival?
 By Garry Wills
 Religious fervor isn't coming back—it never went away. Only now there are new-fangled polling methods to quantify that old-time religion.

PAGE 38



82
The Rhythms in Men's Lives
 By Mary Brown Parlee
 New research shows that men may have separate emotional cycles for dozens of specific moods. But it's not as simple as some would have it. On page 93, Arthur M. Louis demonstrates why commercial biorhythm theory may be a bad buy.

97
Reading Oswald's Hand
 By Edward Jay Epstein
 How a psychologist trained in graphology helped break Lee Harvey Oswald's "legend."

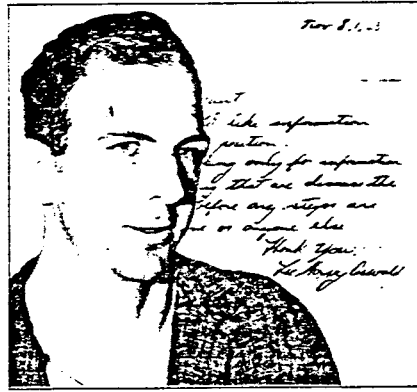
DEPARTMENTS

7
Letters

16
Up Front
Tax Breaks and Breaking Points
 By Amitai Etzioni
 America's "alienated dropouts" have the tax system they deserve.

19
Newsline
 How men and women define "best friend"; and other items.

PAGE 97



104
Personal
In Short, I've Had It
 By Raymond Sokolov
 A brief appeal from a tiny minority: pass the Equal Heights Amendment, and secure the inalienable rights of the puny.

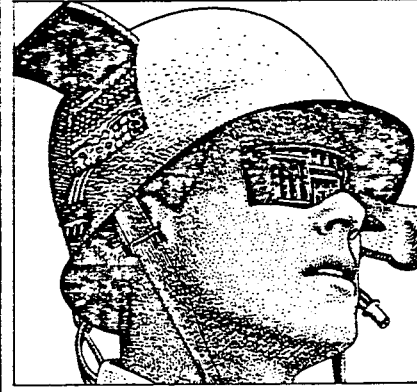
109
Books
The Military Alliance with Behavioral Science
 By Colin Campbell
 Peter Watson's *War on the Mind* details the intersection of psychology and politics; psychologists, making war, may add to the very anguish they are pledged to alleviate.

132
Classified Advertising Marketplace

136
At Issue
On Being a Gay Teacher: My Problems—and Yours
 By "Michael Trent"
 In the closet and in the classroom is an uneasy combination—and only a temporary solution.

Cover: Running through the mind; illustration by Tom Luievitch.

PAGE 109



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READING OSWALD'S HAND

Documents written by Lee Harvey Oswald appear to account for his activities while he was in the Soviet Union from 1959 to 1962. But, according to a graphologist who has worked for the CIA, Oswald's handwriting suggests a different story.

By Edward Jay Epstein

IN 1976, the *Reader's Digest* came to me with an offer to supply almost unlimited financing for a new investigation into the Kennedy assassination. At this late stage, however, the only question that seemed worth exploring was Lee Harvey Oswald's motive in defecting to the Soviet Union in 1959 and his remaining there until 1962.

The question might be answered if we knew what Oswald did during this period. But even the top counterintelligence officers of the CIA and FBI readily admitted that Oswald's life during this three-year period was totally blank as far as they were concerned. There were no live witnesses to his activities in the Soviet Union, except for his wife, Marina, who had met him more than a year after he entered that country. And the CIA had advised the Warren Commission staff that all the official rec-

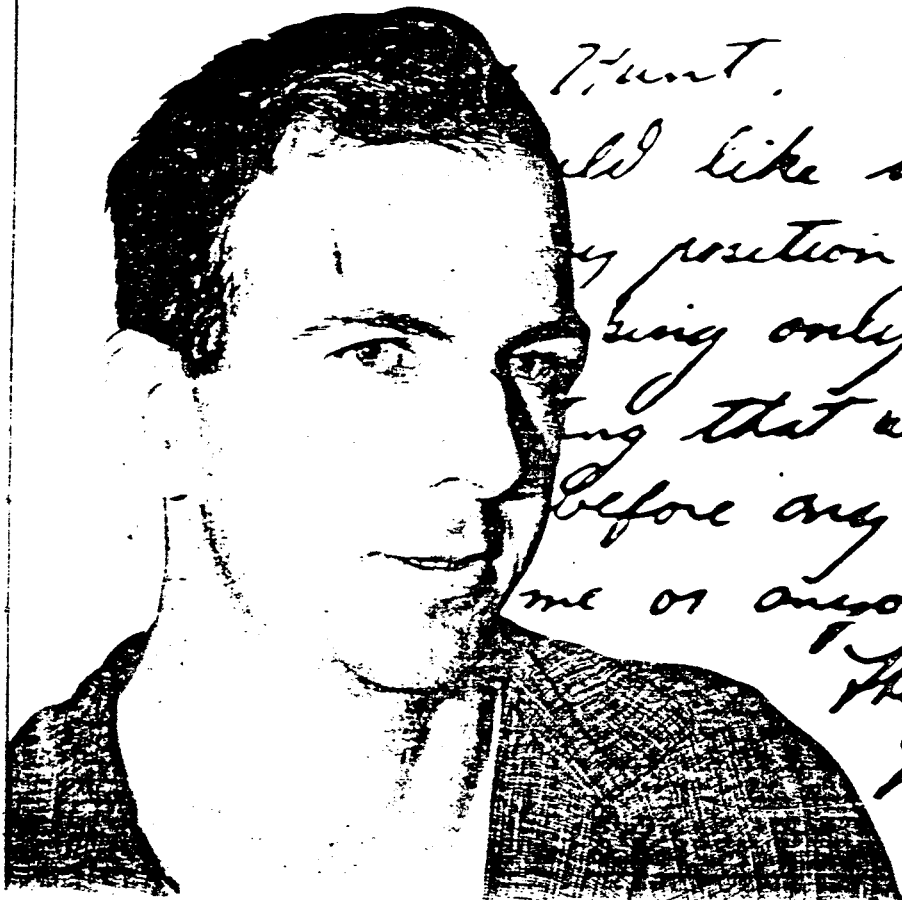
ords, even Oswald's diaries, might be part of a "legend" or cover story, fabricated by Soviet intelligence to hide the real purpose of Oswald's actions.

I went back to what seemed to be the critical turning point in Oswald's life—his defection to the Soviet Union in 1959. By tracking down and interviewing the marines Oswald had served with in Japan before his defection, I made some progress in reconstructing the circumstances of his sudden change of allegiance. During his tour of duty in Japan, it turned out, Oswald had access to highly classified information about the U-2 spy plane, and he had reportedly made contact with leftists in Japan. The thesis I began exploring was that Oswald had been recruited by the Soviets in Japan, and then had defected to them with secrets about the U-2. As it was with the CIA, however, the

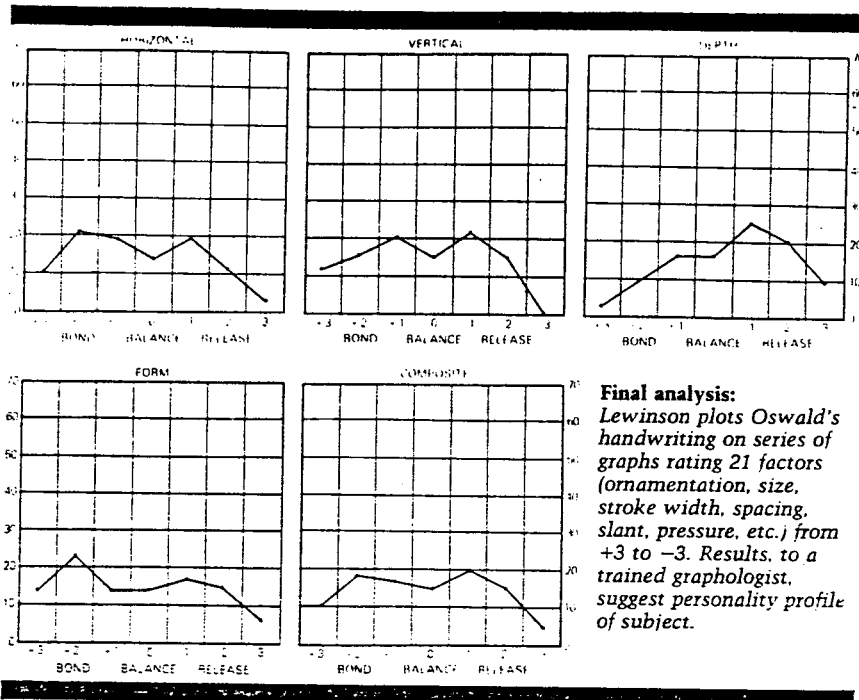
missing piece was what had happened to Oswald in the Soviet Union.

There seemed to be no easy way to fill in this gap in the jigsaw puzzle. My application to go to those cities in the Soviet Union where Oswald lived was turned down by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. A Soviet defector who claimed knowledge of Oswald's activities in the USSR turned out to be highly suspect, and I later found out that he had himself been indicted as a Soviet "disinformation agent" by the CIA.

The only clues to Oswald's existence were a few scraps of papers found among his effects. These included an "Historic Diary," which described his activities from 1959 to 1962; a manuscript called "The Collective," apparently written in the Soviet Union; a few political essays in his handwriting;



Hunt.
I would like information
my position.
being only for information
that we discuss the
before any steps are
me or anyone else.
Thank you.
Lee Harvey Oswald



a slew of letters to Oswald's relatives in the United States, and requests to official agencies for permission to return to America.

These writings, on which the Warren Commission based some of its conclusions, told essentially a very simple story of how Oswald became progressively disaffected with life in the Soviet Union. But, again, the Warren Commission had been advised that these writings were suspect.

There seemed no way around this stumbling block until a former CIA research director mentioned that the agency had on occasion used a graphologist to help crack difficult cases. He even told me that this same graphologist had, in 1964, projected some aspects of Oswald's personality from samples of his handwriting. I was startled—did the CIA believe in handwriting analysis?

The ex-agent explained that the CIA "believed" in anything that produced results, and that this graphologist had apparently helped to solve a few vexing cases for the CIA. For example, from an analysis of clandestine correspondence, the graphologist was able to determine that an anonymous letter writer was lame, and this quickly led to his identification. In less dramatic instances, the graphologist had apparently been able to determine at what points in their documents defectors to the United States from Eastern Europe were showing signs of tension. In fact,

because of the usefulness of graphology, the CIA had made a practice of asking major defectors to write out their autobiographies in longhand.

The graphologist in question turned out to be a woman named Thea Stein Lewinson. She was a Viennese-trained psychologist who specialized in using handwriting as a diagnostic technique.

When I called Dr. Lewinson the next day, she explained to me that she had been an occasional consultant to the CIA but is now in private practice. She works mainly for psychiatrists who send her samples of patients' handwriting for her professional diagnosis. She also analyzes handwriting for some of the most prestigious corporations in the country. These corporations send her job applications filled out by prospective employees, and from their handwriting samples, she evaluates the stability and candidness of the applicants. She also does occasional detective work for police departments all over the United States.

She explained to me that using handwriting analysis as a diagnostic tool has some very distinct advantages over other methods of evaluation used by psychologists. For one thing, it can be used for indirect analysis. The subject does not have to know that he is being tested and analyzed: even if he does know he's writing for purposes of evaluation, he doesn't know which portions of the test material are to be evaluated. More importantly, espe-

cially for my purposes, handwriting analysis is virtually the only diagnostic method that can be used retroactively—to evaluate the state of mind of a subject who is no longer alive or available to speak for himself.

Lewinson told me that the theory behind handwriting analysis was based on the work of the psychologist Ludwig Klages in Germany before World War II. Klages had asserted essentially that the personality makeup of any individual at any point in time could be deduced from any expression of that individual. He concentrated on handwriting as a convenient, permanently recorded expression, and analyzed it as an interplay between "contracting and releasing tendencies." Such tendencies could then be mapped out on a graph to reconstruct the subject's personality.

Dr. Lewinson explained that handwriting specimens are analyzed line by line, moving through three dimensions—vertical, horizontal, and depth. The ornamentation of the stroke, the degree of connection between letters, the relative thinness or thickness of the stroke, the upward or downward direction of the line, the amount of pressure applied, and numerous other components of a line are measured and given a value ranging from -3 to +3, with 0 showing a perfect balance. The values are then plotted on a graph.

Up to this point, it had never occurred to me that handwriting analysis could be used to solve an historic mystery. But if I wanted to find out about Oswald in Russia, it seemed that I had no better alternative—and very little to lose. I thus suggested that Dr. Lewinson begin by examining the "Historic Diary" found in Oswald's papers after he was arrested in 1963.

Arrangements were made with the National Archives in Washington for Lewinson to do a microscopic analysis of the original pages of the diary. After scrutinizing the handwritten document, Dr. Lewinson came up with a startling conclusion: it was fraudulent—at least as an "Historic Diary"! According to Lewinson, there were signs of increasing fatigue in Oswald's handwriting through the first half of the diary, followed by a brief rest and new energy in the second half. This suggested long periods of writing. On further analysis, she ruled out the possibility that Oswald had indeed made separate daily entries in a diary over a year and a half: if he had, the handwriting would have shown a variety of

characteristics corresponding to different moods, tensions, physical conditions, and even his state of health. The last entry was April 1962, which was just when Oswald was preparing to return to the United States (he actually left Moscow June 1, 1962). But there was no doubt in her mind: Oswald had hurriedly printed the diary under great pressure and strain in a relatively short period of time.

Dr. Lewinson further interpreted the signs of pressure and tension she found in this sample of his handwriting as an indication that Oswald might be fabricating or writing this diary on the orders, or under the supervision, of other parties. The fact that the diary was printed rather than written as were other samples of his handwriting reinforced her suspicion that he was being led to provide a legible document for other eyes. If Lewinson was correct in her analysis of his handwriting, it strongly suggested that the diary was fabricated as part of Oswald's cover story or "legend," a retroactive "documentation" of his three years' activities in Russia, for his return to the United States.

The hypothesis was intriguing, but without objective corroboration it remained an hypothesis. Then, quite independently of Dr. Lewinson's work, one of my research assistants found evidence that tended to confirm this analysis.

In a diary entry for October 31, 1959, Oswald discusses a visit to the American Embassy in Moscow, and notes in passing that John McVickar had replaced Richard Snyder as "head consul." In fact, this change did not occur until August 1961, when Snyder was recalled to Washington. In other words, the entry must have been written at least 20 months after it was dated. Another such anachronism appeared in the diary entry supposedly written on January 5, 1960. Oswald quotes his Minsk factory salary in new rubles. However, the devaluation of the ruble, making 10 old rubles equal one new ruble, did not occur until a year after Oswald had supposedly written these figures in his diary. As more and more inconsistencies were turned up in Oswald's so-called diary, it became increasingly clear that Lewinson was correct in her assessment. The "diary" that the Warren Commission had accepted uncritically as their basis for charting Oswald's activities in the Soviet Union (as did the CIA and

Gerald Ford in his book *Portrait of the Assassin*) had actually been hurriedly written just before Oswald was returned to the United States, in order to have a coherent and plausible cover story for whatever he might really have been doing during this period.

The next problem that Lewinson tackled for me was dating two undated documents. The first outlined a Marxist, but decidedly anti-Soviet, political

**"Indications of tension
in the basic stroke,
followed by interruptions,
suggested someone was
dictating his answers."**

philosophy for Lee Harvey Oswald (as well as a rationale for leaving the Soviet Union). The second was a questionnaire, listing the kinds of questions U.S. officials might ask of Oswald on his return. For each question, there were virtually two different answers. The first scribbled set appeared candid and unguarded; the second seemed more circumspect and legalistic. When had Oswald written these materials, and under what circumstances?

Dr. Lewinson again examined the handwriting through her microscope at the National Archives. She noted that the basic stroke—the stroke that does not reflect pressure from the writer—showed very severe disturbances in both documents. Since these disturbances followed the same pattern throughout the writing in both documents, she concluded that both the political notes and questionnaire—as well as the answers—were written at the same time and under the same conditions. Moreover, she determined that Oswald was traveling on a large ship when he wrote both these documents. She said she could detect both wave motions and engine vibrations in the handwriting. In comparing the two different sets of answers to the same questions, Dr. Lewinson found the sort of atactic disturbance in the connecting links between letters that is usually associated with extreme pressure being applied to a writer. The flabbiness in the basic stroke at certain points reflected moments of tension or irritation. And frequent interruption following these tense strokes suggested to Lewinson that Oswald was changing

his answers after receiving some external information indicating his spontaneous answers were wrong or inappropriate. The way in which Oswald wrote down words, and spelled them phonetically, and struck words out and inserted words in their place between lines without interrupting the flow of the writing suggested to her that the answers were being dictated to him by another person aboard ship. But who?

Dr. Lewinson's amazing deductions from these samples of Oswald's handwriting were partly confirmed by Priscilla Johnson McMillan in her book *Marina and Lee*, which was based on some 14 years of sporadic interviews with Marina Oswald. Marina Oswald acknowledged that her husband had written these notes aboard the S.S. *Maasdam*, when they sailed in June from Europe to the United States. Furthermore, she told her biographer, Oswald frequently spoke in Russian to a Russian-born waiter named "Didenko." She had never previously told the Warren Commission or any of the official investigators that Oswald had met anyone on the ship, much less a Russian-speaking person. Could this Didenko be Oswald's tutor, giving him a final briefing on the ship? I found the passenger manifest for the S.S. *Maasdam*, but there was no mention of any Didenko. Unfortunately, the 15-year-old employment records of the *Maasdam* that might solve the mystery of who the Russian-speaking individual was had been destroyed.

Dr. Lewinson offered a third productive lead when she analyzed the handwriting in Oswald's address book. Next to the name of his employer in Dallas, Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall, Oswald had scribbled in the word "microdot." In the world of spies and counterspies, "microdot" has a unique meaning. It is the basic technique by which photographs of a document can be reduced to a dot no larger than that necessary to dot an i. The microdot can then be affixed to a letter and sent to a foreign address. (The CIA's mail-covering program included running suspicious letters through a giant press that attempted to extract microdots from them.)

But why would Oswald, in October 1962, be writing the word "microdot" next to the name of Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall? A microscopic analysis of this writing indicated to Dr. Lewinson that the word had been unfamiliar to Oswald and he had written it down when someone else had repeated it to him.

Moreover, she detected great emotional stress in Oswald at that moment—as if he had just been given a very difficult or onerous assignment.

Exactly what sort of business was Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall engaged in? It had a reputation as one of the leading typesetting firms in the Southwest, and it also had a contract to do classified work for the Army Map Service. Company executives refused to discuss the nature of that work, but a source in the Defense Department established that it was highly sensitive, at least in 1962, when Oswald worked there. One of my researchers, Henry Hurt, flew to Dallas to find out more.

A week or so later, he had the full story on Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall's classified work—and even their floor plans. It turned out that the secret work the firm was doing at the time involved setting the type for long lists of Russian, Chinese, and Cuban cities, which the Army Map Service would send over to Jaggars-Chiles-Stovall on strips of paper. It was clear that these odd-sounding place-names were being set on maps of these countries. Presumably, these highly classified maps were being prepared from photographs being taken by spy satellites (or U-2s¹ that were overflying Russia, China, and Cuba in 1962, and the long lists of names were the more recent targets of surveillance. Since Oswald had complete access to these incoming lists of names from the Army Map Service, he was in a position to report on the priorities of U.S. intelligence, at least as far as this aerial surveillance was concerned. (This coincided with an earlier interest of Oswald's in the U-2 spy plane.)

Was Oswald photographing these strips of names and passing them along via some form of microdot? One employee who worked with Oswald, interviewed by Henry Hurt, said that the FBI questioned him after the assassination about Oswald's access to classified information and showed him a photograph of a leather pouch—presumably Oswald's—that looked like a camera pouch.

I found such investigative leads enormously helpful and had Dr. Lewinson study some 15 other samples of Oswald's handwriting, including personal letters, notes, applications, and other bits of his writing. Although none of these led to dramatic breakthroughs, they did, at times, suggest Oswald's state of mind, the degree to

which he was agitated, and whether he was being tutored or coached at the time he was preparing the material.

I was also interested in the earlier interpretation of Oswald's handwriting that Dr. Lewinson did in 1964. This was based on 15 letters he had written to relatives from Russia between July 1961 and May 1962. She concluded then that Oswald was "a psychopathological person with a misdirected emo-

"Lewinson's analysis led her to see Oswald as an easy target for manipulation and control by others."

tional development which resulted in a precarious, if not deficient, social adjustment."

How did she arrive at this diagnosis from these letters? I asked.

Dr. Lewinson explained that although these letters were written over only a 10-month period, the writing in each showed drastic changes that suggested Oswald was undergoing "intense fluctuating emotions" during this time in Russia. She further found the basic stroke was very "thin," but interrupted by spurts of darkness or "smeariness." This indicated a "blocking" or "stifling" of his emotional intensity. She also found variations in the graphic elements, such as in the size, width, slant, pressure, spacing, and arrangements of words, which are usually associated in handwriting with an emotional disturbance.

She then used her system of plotting the measurement and evaluation of the 21 graphic elements found in Oswald's handwriting on a set of graphs. The first of these graphs, based on the "form" elements, reflects the subject's actual performance of tasks; the second, which charts the "depth" elements in handwriting, measures instinctual drives. It was from these graphs that Dr. Lewinson projected Oswald's personality.

Although I realized it was extremely speculative, I asked Dr. Lewinson if Oswald's handwriting charts provided any clue as to whether or not he acted alone in the assassination.

She answered that "in my opinion, Oswald needed support and guidance from others for carrying out a complex

plan, such as his defection to the USSR and his redefection to the U.S.A., or, for that matter, the assassination."

Did the fact that Oswald was emotionally disturbed rule out the possibility that he might have been used by a conspiracy? Dr. Lewinson, reviewing all the analyses she had done on Oswald both in 1964 and for me, stated, "Oswald was an easy target for manipulation and control by others. His loyalty could switch, depending on whom or where he could find support. Perhaps this word 'support' is the key: it was the dynamic by which he functioned; those who supported him, had him."

Graphology, of course, was only one investigative tool used in certain areas of Lee Harvey Oswald's life that couldn't otherwise be approached. I began by being quite skeptical that handwriting analysis could produce any new clues to Oswald's activities, but quickly came to understand its value in detective work. And I now understand why Dr. Lewinson is consulted not only by the CIA but also by police agencies tracking down criminals. The most worrisome aspect, however, about the effectiveness of handwriting analysis is that it can be used without a subject's realizing it or consenting to being examined. For example, a psychiatrist or prospective employer can submit a patient's or applicant's handwriting without that person ever knowing he has been subjected to such analysis. Another danger could arise from any tendency to rely on it as an exclusive source of information. But if, like Oswald, the individual is dead, graphology may be the best—or only—evidence of the pressures he was feeling at a particular time. It then may suggest further leads to be investigated. In the case of my book, it indicated that Oswald had written documents and letters under severe pressure and in a false time frame. This reinforced the conclusion I arrived at: that Oswald's story about his life in Russia, supported by his own documents and those furnished by the Soviet government, was nothing more than a cover story. □

Edward Jay Epstein received his Ph.D. in government from Harvard in 1972. He has taught political science there, and at MIT and UCLA, where he had an appointment as Regents Professor of Government. His books include *Inquest: The Warren Commission and the Establishment of Truth*; *Counterplot: The Garrison Case*; and *Agency of Fear*, about the politics of opiates. His latest book, *Legend: The Life of Lee Harvey Oswald*, will be published this month by Reader's Digest Press.