

PERSPECTIVE

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Marina Oswald

After years of privacy, she goes public

By LYNN CALHOUN
Staff Writer

HEALTH — You may have passed her this week — at the gas station, grocery store, or nearby shopping mall — and never given her a second glance.

And for that, Marina Oswald is grateful.

Her name is Mrs. Kenneth Porter now and it has been 10 1/2 years since her shy, pony-tailed face was on the front page of the world's newspapers.

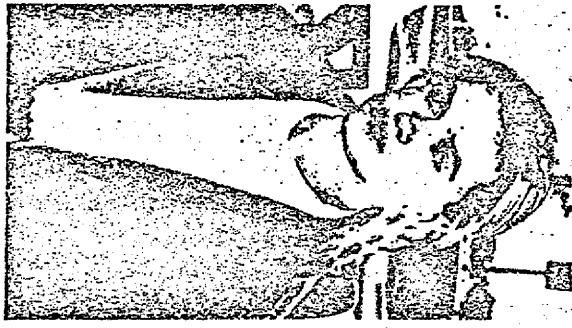
Friends say she is still slightly uncomfortable going out in public today. But when she does, dressed casually in slacks and a blouse and usually with one of her three children in the back of her non-descript white station wagon, she is indistinguishable from thousands of other suburban housewives.

After the years of notoriety as the widow of Lee Harvey Oswald, Marina Nikolaevna Prussakova Oswald Porter, 36, has used time, distance and a new name to escape the public stigma of her husband's alleged crime, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

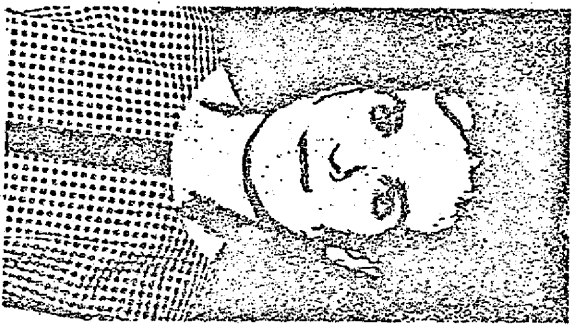
Occasionally a stranger still notices her Russian accent, studies her sharp features, and there is a flicker of recognition. But the inevitable question, "Aren't you Marina Oswald?" is met with such icy stares and curt denials that the queries usually go no farther.

In the nearly 14 years since the shooting in Dallas, photographers and reporters have doggedly pursued an endless string of conspiracy theories involving Lee Harvey Oswald. But his former wife, a 22-year-old mother of two who scarcely spoke English at the time of her husband's death, refused from the beginning to fan the flames of conspiracy. For years she has insisted on a private life, shunned all but the most lucrative movie and book offers and retreated from the carnival atmosphere that still surrounds the Kennedy assassination today.

Marina, her second husband, Kenneth Jess Porter, and their three children have carefully, deliberately faded into obscurity in the rural tranquility of this Rockwall County community, 30 miles east of Dallas. Since the early 1970's the Porters have worked hard at convincing



Marina in 1963



Marina in 1964

their neighbors they are just another farm family.

But there is a growing awareness among residents here that their recluse neighbor is on the verge of becoming a celebrity all over again. And they are curious why Marina and Kenneth are risking their hard-won privacy now to cast in on Marina's name.

For the first time since the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald, Marina has finally agreed to tell her story in a book. The book, "Marina and Lee," set to be released by Harper and Row in October, has already been sold for serialization to a national magazine and is expected to bring Marina squarely back into the public eye again.

Fans looking for exciting new revelations find them in Marina's book. Several of her friends claim the book will simply be Marina's story, her feelings as a young girl moving to a foreign country and her first experiences in America.



Lee Harvey Oswald

"The book is written in a very probing way," Wyeth said. "It follows the Oswalds' day to day life in a very personal manner. I don't know that it contains any new information that has not already been brought out by the Warren Commission, but I believe it will give a number of new insights into Oswald's personality."

One Harper and Row official described the book as "a terrifically long manuscript that required a great deal of time and effort, a good many rewrites and a long time in preparation." While neither agent or publisher would discuss what Marina is being paid for the personal story of her marriage to Oswald, Marina told reporters in 1964 she'd received a \$50,000 advance to do the book with Mrs. McMullan.

Her agent indicated the book's release this fall will be accompanied by a full-scale publicity and promotional blitz that will almost surely include Marina's first personal appearances since the 1960's.

There was a time, with the aid of interviewers, when the youthful Marina Oswald basked happily in the attention of the media. For several years during the late 1960's it was an obvious game of mutual exploitation. Substantial sums of money were the only tickets to an interview with Marina. And for a fee, she routinely repeated her belief that her husband had shot President Kennedy and that he had acted alone.

"I don't want to believe, but I have too much facts, and facts tell me that Lee shot Kennedy," Marina told the Warren Commission in 1964. "I think he



Marina in 1965

wanted to get into the newspaper so the he would be known. It didn't matter to him who he killed. He just wanted to become recognized. He played the big shot so much I'm sure he believed it himself. He was not too much. Sometimes he was a little bit sick...he wanted to be popular so everyone know who is Lee Harvey Oswald. He had no organization. He was alone. Quite alone."

Those who knew Marina in the early days following the assassination - attorneys, relatives, newsmen and business associates - estimate she received between \$200,000 and \$300,000 in donations from a sympathetic American public. Interviewers and the sale of Oswald's possessions, she and her mother-in-law, Margarita Oswald, were branded "a post-assassination slushfund in themselves" by Newsweek magazine.

That magazine made Marina its cover girl Feb. 14, 1964. At one point she even agreed to play herself in a planned, but never produced film, "Countdown in Dallas."

But by 1970 Marina Oswald had quietly dropped out of sight. Today there are no more interviews with Oswald's widow. Period. Anybody interested in talking with Marina has to check first with her agent in New York City.



Marina in 1974

to Rockwall County to escape prevailing newsmen and photographers and marry in the privacy of a Justice of the Peace's home in the tiny town of Peac.

They returned to Dallas and tried unsuccessfully to live a private life in Highland Park and suburban Richardson. Marina claimed Kenneth lost his job as a foreman with Texas Instruments over the publicity their marriage attracted. With her new husband, she bought him a run-down tavern on Knox Street, where the popular Knox Street Pub is located today. But they failed to make a go of it and returned to Rockwall County several years after their marriage, this time with their son, Mark now 11, and Marina's two daughters by Oswald, June Lee, 15, and Rachel, 13, to settle here.

They bought a 17-acre farm on an isolated stretch of Farm Road 560, miles from even the nearest gasoline pump. "Their modest yellow brick house sits well back from the road, looking out onto a pastoral lake in the front yard and miles of open fields.

No trespassing signs are posted at the entrance to their farm, and Rockwall County sheriff Henry Knight and his deputies feel a special commitment to protect their privacy. Unwanted visitors quickly bring a patrol car and a couple of large deputies to clear the property.

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Marina Oswald tells her story 14 years after assassination

MARINA from Page 1

Outwardly, Marina's life today is one of rural tranquility. Neighbors for miles around all know Marina's identity and they leave her alone. Before, they adamantly refuse to talk to the occasional reporters and photographers who find their way to Farm Road 550.

"When she first moved here with Kenneth a couple of years back, I used to point her out to people in my store and tell them who she was," Walter Clifton recalls. "At first I believed they were sort of curious about her and why she'd moved out here. But no one ever paid her too much attention. Everybody respects her privacy here and they pretty much leave her alone. I finally stopped pointing her out to people because nobody seemed to care."

Many of her neighbors view Marina as a victim who has been repeatedly misrepresented and lied about in the media.

Rockwall school officials have gone to great lengths to protect the privacy of Marina's children. Several years ago, at the tenth anniversary of the Kennedy assassination, photographers showed up in Rockwall and snapped pictures of the three children boarding school buses. School and local officials reacted angrily and heightened security in all the district schools. Today it is virtually impossible for a stranger to enter any Rockwall schools without identification and clearance. Reporters are asked to leave.

"We never avoided the subject of the assassination in any of our classes just because Marina's children were here," one teacher recalled. "The students all know about John, Rachel and Mark and they seem to accept it."

In fact, several teachers were surprised when Marina's three children openly announced "my father killed the president" during classes.

Despite the hundreds of thousands of dollars Marina reportedly received in the years following Oswald's death, her lifestyle today shows little evidence of wealth. Kenneth drives a 1960 pickup truck, and Marina occasionally sits out in their 1969 station wagon. Their home is pleasantly but plainly furnished, and the Porters do not farm their 17 acres, leaving the land fallow.

Their marriage has been stormy. Kenneth filed against Marina for divorce on July 18, 1974 in Rockwall County and was granted a divorce Nov. 13, 1974 by Judge Thomas Corlis. In an unusual decision, Judge Corlis granted Kenneth Porter the bulk of the settlement. He was awarded custody of his son, Mark, possession of the acreage, the

house, the pickup truck and station wagon, unearned stocks and his personal property. Marina retained custody of her two daughters by Oswald, but was awarded only the household furniture, and her personal belongings, and a promise from Porter to pay \$25 a month for Rachel's orthodontist bill.

Although there are no records in Rockwall Co. that they remarried, neighbors say they are now back together.

For several years Marina was employed as a sales woman at Titcher's department store at Town East Mall. Although she never shed her Russian accent or a slight shyness about meeting the public, Marina's employers described her as a good saleswoman and were very protective of an alibi she gave before the Warren Commission as its first witness 13 years ago. Accompanied by her attorney and a translator, she poured out volumes of details about her life in Russia before meeting Oswald, her marriage to him in Miami, and the changes in his personality once they moved to America. She also provided the Warren Commission with a lengthy handwritten account of her life with Oswald from the time they met until the very last days.

"If I had not met Lee in the United States and understood him, I probably would not have married him," she admitted. She said if she had it all to do over again, she would not have left Russia with Oswald.

"Even for all the goods that are here I wouldn't have come," and have that happen," she told a reporter.

Born July 17, 1941 in Sevastopol-Dybish, Russia and raised in Leningrad, Marina was an illegitimate child who felt unwanted by her mother and step-father. At 16, she ran away from home. Although she excelled in drawing at school, she studied to be a pharmacist and as a teenager went to work at a pharmacy in Minsk. She enjoyed the work because it was "clean" and she was able to wear a uniform, an outfit Lee admired on her.

"I don't know why. I think he liked it because it would be a very respectable profession to be a pharmacist in the United States. Lee had very pretty girls in Russia, but they were working girls, girls in factories. He could bring about me. He would come to the pharmacy to watch me work," Marina once recalled.

She described herself as a Russian who never felt she belonged in her own

country. "I was always an outsider in Russia," she once said. Six weeks after meeting Lee Harvey Oswald at a dance in Minsk they were married. "Their relationship involved an 'intellectual' discussion in which they both enjoyed discussing ideas while walking around the city. But when she later spoke of the meeting and marrying Lee in Russia, she talked more of the exciting opportunities and experiences in America than of her attraction to Oswald. Still, others described their relationship as "a physical thing that faded with the years."

Soon after their marriage Oswald became frustrated with his factory job earning \$88 per month and their cramped apartment. Six months after their marriage, with a loan of \$195.71 from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Lee, Marina, and their new-born daughter June Lee moved to Fort Worth where they lived temporarily with Oswald's mother, Marguerite, who by Marina's account, treated her "like a bug."

Oswald had difficulty finding work. They moved to a \$59 a month apartment ten blocks from Marguerite Oswald. It was to be the first in a series of small flats and cook-stove-infested apartments that marked their married life in the United States. During this period, Marina told the Warren Commission that Oswald's personality began to change for the worse. He beat her on several occasions, criticized her and ordered her about, she said.

She sought friendship with members of the Russian community in Dallas, and also became close to an American woman, Mrs. Ruth Payne, of Irving. Mrs. Payne was separated from her husband with three children of her own. She was very interested in learning the Russian language and studying Russian culture and she befriended Marina, she later recalled, because she felt sorry for her extreme poverty and inability to speak English.

Marina confided in Ruth Payne after one quarrel with Oswald. "I often feel as if I am caught between two fires" and explained the two fires were her sense of loyalty to her husband and her sense of what was right. Marina noticed her husband becoming more secretive and was aware he purchased a mail-order rifle and a pistol.

Probably the most often voiced criticism of Marina Oswald came after she told the Warren Commission she had known of her husband's attempt to shoot Gen Edwin Walker in April, 1963. Oswald left her a note the night he attempted to take Walker's life instructing her what to do if police took him into custody. Marina found the note and questioned Oswald when he returned

later that night. She later told investigators she loved her husband and felt it would be betraying him to have taken the note to the police. She also testified she later used the note to threaten Lee into "acting better."

Oswald began to tell Marina she had become too Americanized and accused her of becoming just like all her other Russian friends in Dallas — too concerned with money and the things it could buy. He began urging her to return to Russia with him and when she refused, they discussed divorce.

"He told me that he could not change. That I must accept him such as he was. I told him I was not going to accept him as he was, that for the sake of the children I wanted him to improve his behavior."

Marina stayed with a succession of friends while Oswald was in and out of work. Lee finally "came to me crying and said if I did not return he did not want to continue living. He said he didn't know how to love me in any other way and that he would try to change."

"I know now that Lee and I were very poor," Marina said in 1964. "But I thought we were very fortunate. We had a one bedroom apartment complete with a bathtub and kitchen. In Russia people wait a year for this. Now I can see how miserable it was. I couldn't survive it today. But Lee never promised me anything grand when we came to America."

Just before the assassination, Marina and her daughters were staying at Ruth Payne's home in Irving. The night before Kennedy's assassination, Oswald came to visit and begged her to live with him again. Marina was cold toward him and refused to discuss a reconciliation. Oswald left the house early the next morning, Nov. 22, carrying a long package wrapped in brown paper. He told the man who drove him to downtown Dallas that they were curtain rods.

Back at Ruth Payne's home, where this wife and daughters were still sleeping, Oswald had left behind his wedding ring in a small cup and saucer.

Marina later revealed she had taken Oswald's wedding ring and thrown it away when she found it inside the antique cup and saucer.

Dallas residents who knew Marina in the days after Oswald's death noticed rapid changes in her personality. The American public's outpouring of money to the Russian who caught her by surprise. She admitted later she was not prepared for so much so quickly and had been extravagant.

"As a child I always wanted beautiful things I couldn't afford them, but I always admired them. Then, when the money was given me after Lee's death it was too quick, too unexpected. I was too young. I hadn't earned the money. I never understood it. People said I was stupid. It spoiled the very much and it's hard for me to budget now. Prints, paintings and things like that tempt me."

Marina refused to smile for photographers in early photos because of a cracked tooth. She became irate after one photo caught Marina in a full smile, broken teeth and all. She told one of her business advisors that she feared the American people wouldn't see her money if they saw her teeth and thought she was ugly. Soon after her husband's death she had extensive dental work done, learned to use makeup, cut her hair short and carried it, and began to dress stylishly—all habits Oswald would never have permitted.

She enjoyed dancing and going out to clubs in Dallas. She had many dates, but also went out alone, according to a former business associate. There was a succession of homes in Hutchinson and a fast chain of business deals that fell her way. Among them, Tex-Lalia Film Co. offered her \$75,000 for TV and movie rights to her story, plus \$15,000 for each personal appearance she made. Meredith Publishing Company of Des Moines bid \$25,000 for her memoirs. Germany's Der Stern magazine paid \$125,000 for German and Italian serialization rights to her story. Little magazine paid close to \$5,000 for the priced photo Marina took of Oswald showing him at their Oak Cliff apartment posed with his rifle and pistol. She also received \$20,000 from Life for permission to reproduce Oswald's diary of the self-exile to the Soviet Union and several thousand dollars more for publication rights to various pictures of herself and Lee.

Marina was quoted on several occasions as saying the American people were "crazy and glibble" for sending her so much money. She gradually faded with or fell away from most of the attorney's close friends and advisors she initially depended on following her husband's death, including Oswald's older brother, Robert. She reversed hundreds of marriage proposals by mail but after a romantic introduction to Kenneth Porter, who rode into a neighbor's back yard on horseback, Marina furnished her last-pastor lifestyle. She bartered her fish and enjoy the outdoors with the twice-divorced Porter, and tried to impress him musical tastes which ran to Hank Williams, and his pastimes, which consisted mainly of drug pushing.

But three months after their marriage, Marina was in Dallas Justice of the Peace Ed Kitchburg's office seeking a peace bond against her husband for allegedly threatening her with a gun. Porter claimed he returned home from work and found Marina's two daughters at home alone while his wife was at a neighbor's house partying. Kitchburg admonished the Porters to quit attracting bad publicity to themselves and Dallas, and sent them both home without the peace bond.

Since that day, the Porters' lives have taken on the flavor of clean country living.

"Despite the passage of almost 14 years, we're briding people have not forgotten about Marina and Lee," editor Wyatt insisted. "We're hoping this book will not only answer a lot of the questions people have had for years about them as a couple, but will generate a lot of new interest."

Marina's hope to rejuvenate interest in Marina and Lee Oswald appears well-founded. The same month Marina's book debuted, ABC-TV plans to release a two-night, prime-time movie about what the trial of Lee Harvey Oswald might have been like. The two events seem calculated to put the Rockwall County housewife at the top of this fall's media celebrity list — a place Marina insisted she never wanted to be again.