



in by Malou Flato

The Persistence of Memory

Who killed JFK? What really happened in Dealey Plaza? Two days after the assassination, Penn Jones started his own investigation. Twenty years later, he's still on the case.

By Ernest Sharpe, Jr.

If you are driving west through downtown Dallas on Elm or Main, you will—quite suddenly—emerge from the claustrophobic rows of skyscrapers into an open, airy space. Elm and Main join Commerce here to form a brief, broad river of traffic that rushes along, 12 lanes wide, to disappear into the triple concrete archways of a railroad underpass. The banks on either side of this river have been attractively landscaped with grassy slopes topped by bushes, trees and free-standing ornamental facades called pergolas. At the river's head stands a bronze statue, erected in 1938, of civic leader and *Morning News* publisher G.B. Dealey. Nearby is a newer monument, done in a different style and obviously not part of the original design. It is a plain white obelisk which tapers, candlelike, into a carved stone flame.

As a tragic arena, Dealey Plaza disappoints. Nothing about it suggests history or drama. Nothing in it offers a peg for hanging an observation about man or fate. Not properly a plaza, hardly a place, it is just somewhere you drive past on the way to somewhere else. To pass through it takes only seconds.

Twenty years ago, on November 22, the president of the United States passed through Dealey Plaza on his way to deliver a speech in another part of Dallas. The presidential motorcade, which traveled through most of downtown on Main Street, had just turned onto Elm and was approaching the triple underpass when the president and Governor John Connally were shot. The governor was severely wounded. John F. Kennedy was killed. These facts are not in dispute; virtually everything else about that day is.

Underground in Dallas

"Is that where Oswald was?" I asked Penn Jones. I pointed at a square, red brick building overlooking Elm Street. Various tourists were scattered around Dealey Plaza and most of them, like me, stood gazing upward at a corner window one floor from the top

of the structure known as the Texas School Book Depository.

Penn Jones was gazing elsewhere. He was bent over, dragging the cover from a manhole in the sidewalk, hefting the heavy metal lid with an ease that belied his 69 years. He glanced up. "That's where they say he was." He gestured toward the manhole. "Get in."

I stared blankly. "What for?"

"I figure there was a man here with a .45."

"You mean on the day of the assassination?"

"Of course I mean on the day of the assassination! You can sight through the sewer opening into the street. I want you to see for yourself."

I crouched beside the manhole. It looked dark and uninviting. "How did he get away?"

"Same way he got in. This is a flood drain. It goes off in two directions. One of 'em leads to the basement of the county jail. The other comes out near the river."

"How do you know?"

"Because I've crawled up there! Are you getting in or not?"

I eased myself into the hole. Inside, it was dank and foul. I half expected to find a skeleton, its bony fingers still clutching a rusty .45. I peered through the slot in the curb at the three lanes of cars speeding down Elm. I could see the drivers, their faces fixed straight ahead, intent on their destinations. If I'd had a gun, I could have shot any of them.

Jones' head loomed above me, framed in a circle of sky. "Well?"

"Well. . . . It's possible."

"Possible!" he snorted. "I've got a photo of two cops picking up a .45 slug on the other side of the street."

I didn't know what to say. "Wow," I mumbled.

Jones grunted. He was silent for several seconds, then said, "I think there were nine guns firing at Kennedy."

I thought I had misheard. "How many?"

"Nine," he repeated with emphasis.

I surveyed the plaza, trying to imagine hiding places for nine gunmen, lurking in the landscape like figures in a find-the-Indians illustration. I stood in the manhole and looked up at Penn Jones, a short, stocky

(TOP OF COVER)

old man with a craggy face and fierce, beaked nose under a thatch of white hair. He stood on the sidewalk, looking down at me, waiting. He didn't seem to care whether I believed him, only that I respond.

"Wow," I finally said. I said "wow" a lot that weekend.

Where Were You?

Where were you on November twenty-two? On the phone, eating lunch, waiting for a bus? I was waiting for Kennedy. All of Austin was, in fact. Air Force One was scheduled to arrive from Dallas at 3:15, and the city's schoolkids—myself among them—were getting out early so we could watch the motorcade up Congress Avenue, which had been gaily festooned with Christmas lights. Mayor Lester Palmer had proclaimed Friday "John F. Kennedy Day," and more than 3,000 were expected for the \$100-a-plate dinner that evening at Municipal Auditorium. The *American-Statesman*, which Thursday had played the visit second to a shift in foreign policy ("1300 US Soldiers to Quit Viet Nam"), devoted Friday's entire front page to the president's impending arrival, trumpeting that today Austin would be "Capital of the World."

In Mrs. Burrer's American history class, we were discussing the end of World War II when Austin High's principal, Mr. Anderson, came on the P.A. The president and the governor had been shot, he said; he didn't know how badly. A few minutes later, he came back on to say JFK was dead. The class chattered excitedly. Since there would be no parade that afternoon, a friend and I decided to go to a movie. A few of the girls wept, possibly more from a sense of obligation than genuine grief. The event seemed more like an episode of "Twilight Zone" than the latest in-

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stallment of American history, not even as real as the things we had read about, such as Roosevelt's fourth term or the bombing of Hiroshima.

By the time I got home, they already had arrested the president's assassin. Huntley and Brinkley and Walter Cronkite always were careful to say "alleged assassin," but you could hear the distaste in their mouths every time they mentioned his name. Besides, just looking at him—a lean, weasely sort of guy with thinning hair and a tight little smirk—you could tell he was guilty. By Saturday, the FBI had linked him to the murder weapon, and Will Fritz, chief of Dallas homicide, was confiding to reporters that he had the case sewed up.

Sunday, everything exploded when some crackpot, a Dallas nightclub owner, shot and killed JFK's killer. The assassin's assassin said he had done it so Mrs. Kennedy wouldn't have to return for the trial, an appropriately nutty rationale which confirmed the world's suspicion that Dallas was a city chock full of armed lunatics.

Privately, a lot of us thought it was for the best. Now it was all over but the crying. The president's funeral was Monday, and Tuesday, life went back to normal. Schools and stores reopened; radio stations dropped their diet of organ music and the DJs stopped talking like they were in church. Less than a week later, the new president, Lyndon Johnson, announced a special commission to investigate the assassination. In certain ways, it was really a formality,

since anyone could see the case was airtight, and since the assassin himself was underground. Still, it was a good idea. After all, there are always those who will ask idle questions and stir up pointless debate. Without some thorough, conclusive investigation, this thing could just go on and on.

Funeral Games

At first, there were only a few names to remember: Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, Marina Oswald, J.D. Tippit. Their positions on the gameboard were clear and simple. Then, during the next several months, things became more complicated as the number of names grew. Some, like Abraham Zapruder and General Walker, were involved only on the edge of events. Some, like Earl Warren and Chief Curry, were involved in the investigation itself. And some, like Georges De Mohnrenschildt and Fidel Castro, were involved in ways that couldn't quite be puzzled out. A

few years later, a burst of new names—Jim Garrison, David Ferrie, Clay Shaw—made matters not only complicated but bizarre. A decade passed and the list of names continued to grow. Some—James Angleton, Jimmy Hoffa—were really old names newly surfaced. Others—Yuri Nosenko—were foreign names known previously only to a few. Some—QJ/WIN, WJ/ROGUE—weren't even names at all, but codenames for names. Another decade, and the names even started to sound alike: John McCone, John McCloy; H.L. Hunt, E. Howard Hunt. It was enough to daunt the most dedicated gamesman.

Over the years, I followed the names and mastered most of them. My interest in the assassination—like everyone else's—waxed and waned according to evidence and events. Mostly it waxed. I read books, clipped articles, attended a few lectures. Finally, though, I put it aside. The Greeks once played funeral games after the death of a king or hero, but this seemed a futile sport; in fact, a folly. It ate up time and apparently had no end. I took up other sports.

But old follies die hard. Not long ago, I decided to look into one of the names I remembered from my readings. Penn Jones. Full name: William Penn Jones Jr. Jones was an assassination "buff," a "critic," a

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If you haven't heard of Dude Skiles or his band, Beto y los Fairlanes, then you must be from another planet. And if you've begun to take his "avocado rhythm" for granted, then maybe it's time he struck back. *By Greg Stephens*

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It's the city's favorite lake—that's why everyone wants to live along its shores. But can Lake Austin survive its popularity? *By Dennis Wall*

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Before the fall, Texas boxer Tony Ayala was a world-class contender with problems. Afterward, he's just another con doing hard time in a New Jersey prison. A photographic portfolio. *Story by Phil Berger*

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Next month marks the 20th anniversary of the assassination of John Kennedy. For many Americans, the pictures from that day have faded, and the bitterness has long since been absorbed. For Penn Jones, who was in Dallas on November 22, 1963, to greet his president, the details have only grown more vivid. *By Ernest Sharpe, Jr.*

"researcher," a "citizen investigator," one of the few to become widely known. Some had been on the case as long as he, but none longer. The former editor-publisher of the *Midlothian Mirror*, a northeast Texas weekly, he had retired from newspaper work, but not from the Kennedy case. He lived near Dallas, and I thought I would go meet him to find out about the man behind the name. Maybe, I thought, I would find out if there were any new developments, new theories, new evidence. . . . Maybe I would even find out who killed Kennedy.

The Ghost of Dealey Plaza

Jones and I walked up the sidewalk toward the Book Depository. We passed a pair of Japanese businessmen, three teenagers wearing Southfork caps and a Minnesota family complete with baby and grandmother. There are always people in Dealey Plaza. They read the historical marker beneath the "Oswald window," climb the grassy knoll and poke behind the picket fence, take pictures of each other in front of the pergola—which they mistake for a memorial monument—then return to their cars and drive away. For most, it is their first and last visit.

For Penn Jones, today was neither. He has been to Dealey Plaza hundreds of times, haunting Elm Street like an angry, unappealed spirit. He has written and, at his own expense, published four books on the assassination. He has lectured to college audiences, appeared on television, done radio call-in shows, spoken wherever groups of people would hear him. For a while, back in the '60s, he was a figure of some prominence: profiled by national magazines, interviewed on network news, courted by publishers. The press found him irresistible copy, a salty, don't-give-a-damn small-town newspaper editor who charged the government of the United States with outrageous things, using words like "whitewash" and "cover-up" well before they became part of public parlance. People were shocked or amused or indignant, but they listened.

That was years ago, however, and controversies, like everything else, fall out of fashion. Jones no longer receives invitations to lecture and his house is stocked with unsold books. He continues to publish, at a loss, a monthly newsletter updating the community of buffs and critics on such things as fresh evidence and newly released FBI documents. At one time, subscribers to *The Continuing Inquiry* numbered in the hundreds. No longer. The ranks of Warren Report dissidents have dwindled. Many have gone on to other interests, other causes; turned their attentions to families or careers; grown old or simply given up. Not Penn Jones. He was 49 when Kennedy was killed. He is nearly 70 now but still on the case.

There are, however, new recruits to the study of conspiracy. One of them is Elaine Kavanaugh, Jones' companion for the past three years. A slender, 30-year-old blonde with shoulder-length hair and soft Swedish looks, Elaine stood at the corner, quietly offering copies of Penn's newsletter, *The Continuing Inquiry* to passers-by. Those who stopped she would catechize with such questions as, "How do you think a lousy shot like Oswald could have scored twice in just six seconds?" or, "If the shots came from the Depository, why didn't Kennedy fall forwards instead of back?" A few would stay to talk, but most simply shrugged and went on. Elaine didn't seem to mind. This was missionary work; just one conversion made it all worthwhile. Most people, though, didn't require converting. The consensus seemed to be that of course there was a conspiracy and of course there was a cover-up. No one appeared surprised or aroused or even bothered by the thought. Vietnam and Watergate and countless other, smaller betrayals have eroded public trust in public officials. Dealey Plaza is where it all began.

We joined Elaine, who was conversing with two men, a father and son. The son, who taught history at

a private high school, was cheerful and good-looking in an all-American way, as though he had stepped from the front of a corn flakes box. He was saying the sort of things that, 20 years ago, only someone who looked like a beatnik would have voiced. His father, who had the silver hair and kindly manner of a family physician, nodded in agreement as his son explained why he thought the Secret Service had a hand in the president's death. He cited passages from David Lifton's best-selling book, *Best Evidence*. "Have you read it?" he asked Jones.

"I've read it," Penn grunted, adding after a moment, "I've written four books myself."

"You *have*? What's your name again?"

"Penn Jones."

"Haven't heard of you," the teacher apologized. "Have you met David Lifton?"

"I've met him."

"We thought we'd see Parkland Hospital next. Have you been there?"

"I've been there. I've got a photo of Jack Ruby leaving Parkland."

"You do?"

"I took it that afternoon. The Warren Commission says he wasn't there, but there he is."

"You were in Dallas when Kennedy was killed?"

"Hell, yes! I was waitin' to take his picture!"

Waiting for Kennedy

It had rained earlier that morning, but by 11 a.m. the skies had cleared and the bubbletop for the limousine was deemed unnecessary; the president could ride in an open car. Air Force One touched down at 11:37, but the airport was packed and JFK lingered to work the crowd, shaking hands, chatting, flashing the Kennedy smile. It was close to noon before the motorcade of 20-odd cars left Love Field.

As the president drove toward downtown Dallas, Penn Jones was driving through it on his way to the Dallas Trade Mart, where Kennedy was to address a Democratic luncheon. On the seat beside Jones was his camera. He was covering the speech for the *Mirror*, but he had another reason for going as well. To Penn Jones, John Kennedy was not only his president, he was his brother-in-arms, a man of courage and heart. Of the same generation, only a few years apart, both had fought in the war and, afterwards, con-

I could see the drivers, their faces fixed straight ahead, intent on their destinations. If I'd had a gun, I could have shot any of them.

tinued to fight for liberal ideals. Jones did not simply admire Kennedy; he revered him. Once before he had shaken Kennedy's hand, and today he was looking forward to doing it again. He steered the car down Elm Street and through Dealey Plaza. He thought that it would be a good spot to watch the parade.

The clock on the Hertz Rent-A-Car sign on top of the building at Houston and Elm said 11:45, and below, the workers on the sixth floor broke for lunch. Two of them, descending in one of the Book Depository's ancient elevators, heard a new employee, Lee Oswald, call after them to send it back up.

Neither knew if he took it or not, but somehow, either by the elevator or the stairs, Oswald managed to get down. A co-worker, Charles Given, said he saw him reading a newspaper on the first floor at ten minutes to 12. Several months later, Givens expanded his story to include a second, noon sighting of Oswald on the sixth floor. If that were true, however, the other two co-workers who saw Oswald standing by

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the telephone on the first floor must have been mistaken. Yet another co-worker, Bonnie Ray Williams, who returned to the sixth floor at noon to eat his lunch, found neither Oswald nor anyone else there. Williams ate quickly, anxious to finish in time to get to the street and see the president, who was supposed to pass the plaza at 12:25. In ten minutes, Williams, too, was gone.

Ten minutes later, at 12:15, five minutes before the parade was scheduled to pass, Carolyn Arnold observed Oswald in the otherwise empty second-floor lunchroom. Arnold, one of the building's secretaries, had regular contact with the aloof young man, who often came into her office for change. That day, he was sitting in a booth, apparently eating his lunch, "alone as usual." Mrs. Arnold gave her account to the FBI, whose official report stated vaguely that she "thought she caught a fleeting glimpse of Lee Harvey Oswald standing in the hallway" sometime prior to the assassination. Not surprisingly, she was not called before the Warren Commission and her story was lost in the files.

Across the street, at the same time, 12:15, Arnold Rowland nudged his wife and pointed to what he took to be Secret Service men guarding windows on either end of the Depository's sixth floor. The two had to be Secret Service, Rowland reasoned; one of them had a rifle. Carolyn Walther also saw the two men, one holding a rifle. Several minutes later, so did Ruby Henderson. The Hertz clock now said 12:25, but the president had not yet arrived; he was running five minutes late.

In the railroad yards next to the triple underpass, Lee Bowers leaned out the window of the two-story Union Terminal tower. From his vantage point, he could see not only the yards but the parking lot behind the grassy knoll. Earlier, he had noticed a station wagon prowling around the lot. The car had left, but a few minutes later, another had entered and circled the area while its driver spoke into a microphone. Now, yet a third vehicle cruised slowly around the lot. Like the station wagon, it had out-of-town plates,



Elm Street and the pergola from Penn's manhole.

Goldwater stickers, even the same red mud on the sides. It left the same way as the others, through the Elm Street exit. Bowers also saw two men standing by the picket fence that ran along the knoll. His attention was distracted by the sound of the approaching motorcade and, when next he looked, the two had disappeared, perhaps lost in the foliage around the fence.

Next to the grassy knoll, Dallas dressmaker Abraham Zapruder clambered onto the pergola's concrete pedestal and aimed his new movie camera up Elm. Zapruder had tried two other spots, but this was the best. Here he would have a perfect view of the motorcade; he could shoot right over the crowd.

First, the people in the plaza heard the cheering as the parade approached on Main. Then the pilot car, driven by Police Chief Jesse Curry and including Sheriff Bill Decker and two Secret Servicemen, drove into sight, emerging from the tall downtown buildings. It snaked a slow right turn onto Houston, headed straight toward the Depository for a block, then made a slow left onto Elm. Behind it, a big black Lincoln did the same. Driving the Lincoln was

Secret Service agent Will Greer, and beside him, agent Roy Kellerman. In the seat behind them were Governor Connally and his wife, Nellie. In the seat behind them were the president and the first lady. The politicians and their mates smiled and waved to the crowd as they proceeded down Elm. The hands of the Hertz clock pointed to 12:30.



Some people in the crowd thought the flurry of popping sounds was firecrackers. Others thought it was backfire. Abe Zapruder heard them, too. A freeway sign momentarily blocked his view of the limousine, and when it came into sight again, he saw through his viewfinder that the president was grimacing, his hands clutched to his throat. Jacqueline had turned to look at him and so had Governor Connally. Both seemed more puzzled than alarmed. Zapruder thought Kennedy was joking, that he had heard the firecracker noise and was pantomiming, "They got me!"

Zapruder tracked the limousine as it continued down Elm. Connally, unable to see Kennedy, was turning in the other direction when suddenly his hair flew up and his cheeks puffed out as though someone had struck the wind from him. He slumped from sight into his wife's arms.

A few yards behind, and to Zapruder's right, from the direction of the grassy knoll, the cameraman heard a loud report. There was no mistaking it for fireworks. Something whizzed past his ear, but he continued to film, although what he saw next sickened him. The president's head exploded in a burst of red, his body hurtled back against the seat as blood and brain tissue splattered Jackie and two motorcycle policemen following the limousine. Finally, Agent

Greer seemed to realize something was wrong. The car shot forward, disappearing into the underpass, trailed by the motorcycles, their sirens wailing. Zapruder lowered his camera, trembling. The hands of the clock still pointed to 12:30. Only six seconds had elapsed since Zapruder first heard the "firecrackers."

Several in the crowd were pointing up at a window in the Book Depository, but others were running in the direction of the grassy knoll. First to reach the top was patrolman Joe Smith. He smelled gunpowder, but the place was empty except for a man standing beside a car in the parking lot. Smith, his gun drawn, was joined by a deputy sheriff; the two officers walked over to the man. The stranger pulled a wallet from his back pocket and flashed Secret Service credentials. The two lawmen scanned them, then continued their search. By then, others were on the scene, and soon the lot swarmed with people. Later,

the Secret Service said no agent was even near the knoll that day. Later, patrolman Smith realized the stranger didn't even look like Secret Service; he was casually dressed, no coat, and he had dirty hands, "like an auto mechanic."

Over in the Book Depository, a minute and a half after the final shot, patrolman M.L. Baker was also pointing a gun at a stranger. Baker had been racing up the stairs with building manager Roy Truly when he glimpsed someone in the vestibule outside the second-floor lunchroom. He drew his pistol and called to the man, who was leaning against a vending machine, sipping a Coke. The fellow came over, "calm and collected." At that moment, Truly came down the stairs to identify him as an employee, Lee Oswald. Oswald, both later remembered, did not seem excited, afraid or even out of breath. Baker put his gun away and the two continued their dash up-

stairs, leaving Oswald, impassive as before, holding his Coke.

The Back

Two miles away, at the Dallas Trade Mart, Penn Jones was eating a salad, dining early so he could take photos during the banquet. He heard the distant wail of sirens. The sound grew closer, passed by the Mart, then faded. Puzzled, Jones turned on his transistor radio. The president, he heard, had been shot; no one knew how badly. He had been taken to Parkland Hospital. Jones left the Mart and drove down Stemmons Freeway to Parkland, less than a mile away. He stood outside, waiting for news. Others arrived and soon the hospital was thronged with anxious faces. Jones still had his camera and he snapped a few pictures.

At 1:30, the crowd's worst fear was confirmed: JFK was dead. Half an hour later, the casket left Parkland in an ambulance. Jones took a last photo of everyone watching the body depart. Later, studying the developed picture, he noticed someone who wasn't. He was in the right-hand corner, striding away from the scene. The man's back was to the camera, but later that back was to be famous, the most famous back in the world. The individual to whom it belonged, a clownish, abrasive character named Jack Ruby, was well known in certain quarters of the city, but this photo was his first public appearance as the Back. Even this early in its career, though, the Back's trademark features—short legs, lumpy body, hunched shoulders, baggy suit, two-dollar haircut and Dick Tracy hat—were fully formed and ready for

Jones grunted. He was silent for several seconds, then said, "I think there were nine guns firing at Kennedy."

their moment on the world stage. The Back's owner was leaving Parkland, where he had spent the last few minutes anxiously inquiring after the president's health and tugging the sleeve of reporter Seth Kantor to ask if he should close his nightclub.

Jones, too, left Parkland. He went to Dealey Plaza and disconsolately inspected the scene, snapped a few more shots, then drove home to Midlothian. Over the weekend, he and his wife, Louise Angove—"L.A." for short—stayed by the television. That same day, they learned that a suspect had been arrested. A worker at the Book Depository, he apparently had killed a patrolman, J.D. Tippit, in Dallas' Oak Cliff section about 45 minutes after the assassination. The police had cornered him in a nearby movie house and he was now being questioned.

Somehow, Friday and Saturday passed. Sunday morning, they were again in front of the TV, watching a live telecast of the suspect being transferred from the city to the county jail, which offered greater security. The police department basement was jammed with cops and the press. The transfer was scheduled for ten, but it was 11:20 before the elevator doors opened and the prisoner was led out, handcuffed between two detectives. Then, as Penn and L.A. and millions of others watched, the Back lunged onto the screen, blurted a line straight from a Cagney movie—"You killed my president, you rat!"—and plugged Lee Harvey Oswald right in his yellow gut.

The first death that weekend had devastated Jones. This one galvanized him. The shooting of John Kennedy changed history; the shooting of Oswald—which forever precluded any certain verdict of his innocence or guilt—changed the life of Penn Jones. Previously, he had fought, through the *Midlothian Mirror*, for open city government, integrated schools and social justice in all its forms. Now he was inter-

ested only in bringing to justice whoever killed JFK. He had no affection for Oswald, even if he did not pull the trigger. He was a "gutless little bastard who would have squealed the first chance he got," but the same agency that had seen to Oswald's death obviously had directed the president's.

Jones spent Sunday and Sunday night preparing a special edition of the *Mirror*, which usually came out on Thursdays. It appeared Monday, and, while papers around the state were making clucking noises of "it could have happened anywhere," the *Midlothian Mirror* stated its case in an enormous page-one headline, "Disgrace of Dallas." While Jones did not directly accuse the entire city of complicity in the murder, he did declare that Dallas was filled with a bubbling rancor toward anyone to the left of Coolidge, an atmosphere that could only have encouraged the violence that struck down JFK. Taking potshots at Dallas eventually became a journalistic sport, particularly in publications on the East Coast, where it was a pleasant way to pass a paragraph or two. To do so on a regular basis, however, within 25 miles of the city itself, took somewhat greater nerve.

The special edition was the first shot in a personal

war that is still being waged. The enemy in this war is not only whoever was responsible for the president's death, but anyone who participated in the cover-up as an "accessory after the fact." For that matter, it is anyone who approved of Kennedy's departure from the national scene. To Jones, that includes the rich, the military, local politicians, oilmen, most of the police force, right-wingers in every social stratum and criminals like Carlos Marcello and Richard Nixon. While Jones is the first to admit that his hornet attacks have drawn little blood from his targets, on his own side there have been casualties. One of them was his 38-year marriage to L.A.

This Is the Life!

For its first issue of the new decade—January 1950—*Redbook* magazine devoted a number of pages to a feature entitled "This is the Life!" which

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begins in storybook prose, "In a friendly Texas town called Midlothian, there is a young couple—Mr. and Mrs. Penn Jones Jr.—who have made come true all the dreams of their four years of wartime Army life." Accompanying photos in technicolor tints show the happy pair interviewing farmers, soliciting ads, smiling at each other over the Linotype and tucking their children in for the night. The article concludes, "Sometimes I pinch myself to make sure this is real," Louise says. "But if Penn and I are dreaming, I hope we never wake up!"

The Jones family—a handsome young couple with two fine boys, Penn III and Michael—was typical in 1950 not only of young Americans but of America itself. At the beginning of the new decade, the country seemed to have a dream date with destiny. The crucible of the war had proved it to be strong, and the postwar boom showed it to be rich. Taking over world leadership from Europe's doddering hands, America was determined, like an earnest Dale Carnegie graduate, to show other countries how they, too, could be successful. Even those Americans who, like Penn Jones, didn't share this smug self-image still believed in the nation's basic goodness and hopeful future. Sure, we've got problems, but we'll roll up our sleeves, join hands and whip 'em. Just like we did Hitler!

This new generation of Americans was ready to lead the march into the modern world, even if it took some doing to get their fellow countrymen to join the parade. When Penn Jones acquired the *Mirror*, he wrote an editorial tipping his hat to the paper's forebears (under one name or another, it had been around since the 1880s) and swearing his and L.A.'s commitment to the community. Speaking in the editorial "we," he went on to say, "We intend to insult those people who fail or refuse to fulfill the obligations or responsibilities they have inherited along with their citizenship in the greatest country on earth." Ah, the outspoken idealism of youth! Midlothian read and approved. What Midlothian didn't

Consensus seemed to be that there was a conspiracy and of course there was a cover-up. Vietnam and Watergate and countless other betrayals have eroded public trust in public officials. Dealey Plaza is where it all began.

know was that Penn Jones meant it.

If there was an edge of self-righteousness in Jones' editorial style, it was impelled—and softened—by a genuine and full-hearted concern for everyone in the world with a thin blanket. Penn Jones Jr. grew up in grinding rural poverty, came of age during the Depression and spent his early manhood as an infantryman in World War II. He did not come by his liberalism through books or speeches; he earned it with his own two hands.

"A little guy, but a real bulldog," is how one old friend remembers Penn from the high school football team. It was the same bulldog determination that made him ride to school on the family mule those days his father could spare him from working their small sandyland farm. It also carried him—after graduating from Clarksville High—to Magnolia A&M Junior College in Arkansas, a hundred miles from his East Texas home, the farthest he'd ever been. Two years later, it carried him to the University of Texas, where he enrolled in law school, sharing classes with such lights as the president of the Students' Association, John B. Connally.

Jones never finished law school. A member of the National Guard, in 1940 he was called to duty with the 36th Infantry Division. Soon after, while billeted in Austin, he met a smart, vivacious young woman

who, like himself, was from a small town. Her name was Louise, but Penn soon abbreviated that to "L.A.," and the two of them joked that she was the only girl he could find who stood shorter than his own 5'2". In July 1943, he and L.A. were married. Penn III was on the way when Jones left a month later for the invasions of Salerno and southern France, where he earned a captain's commission and seven battle stars, including the Bronze.

In August 1945, Penn returned to the States and his family, and, like millions of other soldiers and their brides, he and L.A. made plans for the future. In Europe, he had met a number of war correspondents, and the idea of newspaper work tickled his fancy. A big city didn't, though, and when the pair heard of a tuckered-out little weekly going for a song down in Ellis County, they snapped it up for what they thought was a bargain \$4,000. What they soon discovered was that the former owner had inflated the paper's circulation to three times its real size.

(Pop. 1,521)

Undeterred, Penn and L.A.—both rookie journalists—set about making the *Midlothian Mirror* a success, which meant getting involved in Midlothian. A "whistlestop without a whistle," Midlothian is one of those Main Street communities urban journalists love to poke fun at by tacking the population after the name, as in "Midlothian (pop. 1,521)." The town is somewhat larger now than it was then, but in other ways it seems spookily unchanged, a pleasant, prosperous hamlet of brick and frame houses lining quiet streets shaded by elderly elms. Town life centers around the various churches, the hardware store, the Dairy Queen and, of course, the town paper.

At first, Penn and L.A. seemed to fit right in. Mrs. Jones involved herself in community affairs and Mr. Jones joined the Chamber of Commerce and the Lion's Club. They enrolled Penn III and, later, Michael in local schools. Although Penn was an atheist, he dutifully reported church activities in the *Mirror*. The paper also chronicled FFA meetings, ladies' club lunches, high school football games and what little local crime could be found. Penn wrote editorials which L.A. rewrote in a more graceful English. Ads and circulation picked up and the future of the *Midlothian Mirror* looked as bright as the roses outside the Jones' new two-story home. . . . Then Penn decided to cover the school board.

When he first showed up for its regular, privately held meeting, the board members were surprised but cordial. They quickly huddled and one finally emerged to explain jocularly that—heh, heh—of course he was welcome to sit in, but surely he didn't intend to—heh, heh—print everything discussed, did he? Jones' answer was a blunt affirmative. The board rehuddled and voted to throw him out. Penn not only wrote up the board's behavior in his newspaper, he showed up at its *next* meeting.

And so on. Penn's prickly iconoclasm was the kind of stuff that country editors are supposed to be made of, but seldom are. When a lieutenant in the Dallas Police Department offered him the lucrative contract to print the Ku Klux Klan's regional newsletter, his response was in the choice language of the Fighting 36th. When the town paved streets in Midlothian's black neighborhood with gravel that was one part rusty nails, Penn put it on the front page, as well as displaying 50 pounds of paving in the *Mirror's* front window. When an angry John Bircher protested an editorial by starting a fist-fight in the newspaper office, Penn wrestled him outside, grabbed him by the ankles and proceeded to thump his head against the curb until a policeman intervened. This was community involvement in a way no one had anticipated.

It did not go unappreciated. One moonless night in the spring of 1962, someone fire-bombed the newspaper office. As Penn and the volunteer fire department doused the blaze, an elderly dressmaker

summed up the attitude of many in the crowd. "It's a shame they didn't let it burn down," she loudly remarked. A year later, in July 1963, Southern Illinois University remarked on the event in a different way, bestowing on Penn the prestigious Elijah Parish Lovejoy Award, a national honor reserved for journalists who have shown the courage of their convictions.

Penn was proud. So were L.A. and the kids and the family's friends. Even Midlothian seemed proud. Things had settled down and the couple's finances had picked up. L.A. had inherited some money which Penn invested in local real estate, a shrewd move that eventually made them wealthy. One of the investments was a run-down house on a little spot of land outside Waxahachie. Typically, Penn let a poor family live in it rent-free for several years. Later, when he was involved in other things, he even forgot he owned it.

To Penn Jones, it seemed only right to share his good fortune with others. All his life he'd been a sucker for a sad story, loaning money to hitchhikers and digging in his pocket for friends. His political philosophy was an extension of his personal generosity. Not everyone was equally generous. When Penn campaigned to raise taxes for school improvements, he made enemies among the county's landowners. He didn't give a damn.

Or said he didn't. Actually, he felt terribly isolated sometimes. Midlothian was, like its big sister to the north, Dallas, a rock-ribbed, conservative community. Aside from his neighbor over in Mansfield, John Howard Griffin, the author of *Black Like Me* and an admirer of the *Mirror's* staunchly Democratic stance—if not its prose—Penn had no real political fellows. So it was with particular pleasure that he heard the man he admired above all others, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, was coming to Dallas. In fact, he could hardly wait.

Interlude: Believe It or Not

Where were you on November twenty-two, and can you prove it? Over the years, the roll call of assassination suspects has included nearly everyone, and certainly every ogre of recent American history: the CIA, the FBI, Castro, anti-Castro exiles, Texas oil millionaires, the mob, the police, the Kremlin, even the Illuminati. Who did it? Well, who do *you* think has been gumming up the works for the past 20 years? For every bias, there is a body of evidence that will implicate your favorite villain, whether it's the military-industrial complex, Howard Hughes or a social misfit with a mail-order gun. The Kennedy assassination is like an experiment in quantum physics where the interests and expectations of the observer shape the reality observed. Watch out, though; the deeper you go into the dark hole of Dealey Plaza, the easier it is to lose your grip on the more probable

To Penn Jones, John Kennedy was not only his president, he was his brother in arms, a man of courage and heart.

realities, to shine your flashlight on a couple of pet notions and follow them through the case's winding tunnels until you forget the direction back.

This is partly due to the sheer size of the evidence. Defenders of the Warren Report cite its bulk as a measure of its credibility: over 26,500 interviews; 3,100 FBI and Secret Service reports; 30,000 pages of information on everything from Jack Ruby's childhood to the KGB in Mexico City. All in all, the evidence fills 26 volumes and reminds one of Vietnam, another massive and discredited enterprise that stumbled not from sinister designs but innocence of pur-

pose. Knowing what the end should be, all we need to know is how to reach that end. We've got a guy that says he saw Oswald firing from the sixth floor. He's nearsighted and he couldn't pick him out of a lineup, but he says he saw Oswald do it and since Oswald did it, he must have seen him. We've got some other people who say they saw two men on the sixth floor. Never mind, eyewitness testimony is notoriously unreliable.

"No investigation is 100 percent perfect," Hugh Aynesworth explained to me with good-natured patience. Aynesworth is a former *Dallas Morning News* reporter who has followed the case from the first day. By now, he is a little sick of the whole thing, but he is always willing to take a few minutes to set someone straight. "Every case has its inconsistencies and loose ends. Those don't necessarily invalidate it." One of those who nominated Penn Jones for the Lovejoy Award, Aynesworth is more amused than angered by

those who try to find gunmen on the grassy knoll or elsewhere. "Oswald killed Kennedy. The facts are on file." Case closed. The subject is no longer worth debate.

Like Aynesworth, Warren Report supporters tend to strike the pose of Weary Reason, shaking their heads at the infinity of human folly and scolding conspiracy theorists like Erasmus chiding astrologers. They sit in their lawn chairs and watch the critics madly hopping hedges trying to nail J. Edgar Hoover or the Dallas police. When it comes time to arraign Oswald, though, they have to do a bit of dashing themselves. Motive, means and opportunity are the three essential considerations in any homicide trial, and on every one the case against Oswald is frail.

Opportunity. Taking the last first, any reconstruction of Oswald's behavior makes him appear more madcap than murderous. Here's the timetable: On the sixth floor at 11:45, he shuttles downstairs and

[CONTINUED]

Krone, Lowest Lane, Polly Lanning, Anne Lewis, Janis Loeb, Lone Star Silver and Associates, Angelo Mantas, Dena Marks, Scott Newton, Stephanie Beardsley Powell, Bob Robbins, Rusty Speck, B. W. Spicer, Roberta Starr, Maggie Steber, Roland Stephen, Greg Stephens, Robyn Turner, Dennis Wall, Irene Wong, Rebecca Works, Dan Yoxall.

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lurks in corners until ten minutes before the president is supposed to pass. He sneaks back up to the sixth, grabs his hidden rifle, pots Kennedy, rehides the gun, zips downstairs to grab a Coke and feign mild surprise—"Who, me?"—as a cop pulls a gun on him 90 seconds after the act. It all resembles an episode of "I Love Lucy," as Lucy Ricardo tries to be in two places at once without Ricky catching on.

Means. Oswald's chosen instrument of execution was a bolt-action WWII Italian carbine that soldiers like Penn Jones used to call "the humanitarian gun," because it would never shoot anyone on purpose. "A cheap old weapon" is how one FBI expert characterized it. It had a quirky trigger, difficult bolt and scope so misaligned it had to be adjusted before the FBI could test-fire it. As a marksman, Oswald was hardly better than his weapon. A former Marine, his performance on the rifle range had been mediocre. His shooting on November 22, though, was described by another expert as "a feat such as could be realized only by a crack shot with years of training behind him."

Motive. Oswald never even said he *disliked* Kennedy, much less wanted to shoot him. Well, he was crazy, wasn't he? No, Oswald's behavior was sometimes odd, but never—except in the dubious testimony of his wife, who said he wanted to shoot Richard Nixon on a day Nixon wasn't even in town—irrational. The Warren Commission finally decided he did the deed from a desire for "a place in history," a phrase picked up from his diary. Unlike Sirhan Sirhan, Arthur Bremer, John Hinckley, Mark Chapman and other pathetic pistol-wavers, Oswald chose to perform his historic act hidden from public view. Moreover, he denied culpability to the end. "I didn't shoot anybody, no sir." Perhaps he wanted a *secret* place in history.

So what? None of these difficulties prove anything other than the difficulty—and perhaps inexplicability—of Oswald's alleged deed. They may make it less likely, maybe even unlikely, maybe even improbable, but not impossible. And that is the basic strength of the Warren Report. That is why, despite the scavengers and sensationalists with their sly innuendo and unanswered questions, it still stands today. Because it proved conclusively and beyond the shadow of a doubt that *it was not impossible* for Lee Harvey Oswald to have killed John Fitzgerald Kennedy. By himself. Period.

All right, admit its supporters, the Warren Report may not be water tight, but it's still the best model we have of the events of November 22. Consider the alternatives. The critics' theories are more contrived than a thriller by Le Carré. When in doubt, apply Occam's Razor. The simplest explanation is the one most likely to be true.

Those who shave with Occam's Razor, however, should be required to do so everyday, not just when it suits their ends. Certainly, in this day and age of people shooting other people to gain attention and respect, the notion of a twisted malcontent blasting a public figure is simpler than, say, renegade elements of the CIA plotting with embittered Bay of Pigs survivors and Mafia middle-management types to blow away the chief of state in order to take the heat off the mob and start a war with Cuba. Unfortunately, the one-nut, one-gun model of November 22 falters badly when applied to other areas of evidence.

Let's take just one. The Zapruder film clearly shows Governor Connally reacting to his wounds (in the chest, wrist and leg) a full second after the president reacts to his. The difficulty is that this is too late to have been the same bullet and too soon to have been a second, at least if there was only one gunman working a bolt-action rifle. Setting Occam on the shelf, the chief justice and his fellow commissioners decided that the problem was really with Connally, who was a little slow in picking up that his rib and wristbone had just been shattered by a high-powered rifle bullet. . . . Well, it's possible.

Except there's just one more little problem, as Lieutenant Columbo used to say. If one bullet hit both men, you should be able to draw a straight line from the Book Depository through Kennedy's and Connally's wounds. You can't. At least not if the two were

sitting straight up and facing ahead, as photos show them doing. Well, said the commission, at the moment of impact, Kennedy had turned just so and Connally had turned just so, and the bullet also must have veered a little after it hit Kennedy and it's all *possible*.

Yeah, that's good. That's probably what happened all right. There's just one more thing, sir. The bullet that did all this damage wasn't taken out of anyone's body. It was found on a stretcher in Parkland Hospital. And it's in pristine condition. Ballistics matched it to Oswald's gun, no problem there, but despite the fact that it put four holes in two men, Commission Exhibit 399 looks as though it's passed through nothing harder than cotton wadding. That's what bothers me, sir.

The problem of the "Magic Bullet" bothered a lot of people, including the commission itself. It arranged to have a bullet of like caliber fired through the wrist of a cadaver, to compare damage. The sec-

ond bullet was hopelessly mangled. Undaunted, the commission actually advertised the conundrum by publishing photos of each slug side by side, a stroke of genius that asserted the bullet's authenticity by proclaiming its singularity, like an illustration in a newspaper's "odd facts" column. Strange but true, 399 did all this damage and it's still in better shape than a Timex watch. Believe it or not!

Cross and Grail

In the months following the assassination, readers of the *Midlothian Mirror* noticed a shift in subject from the familiar editorials against city hall. One of

the earliest of these began: "In the discharge of our duty as a newspaper editor, we must do everything possible to bring into some intelligible whole ALL the events surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy.

"Inquiry is the lifeblood of truth, and the careful report of inquiry is the newspaperman's cross and grail.

"But grails are no longer attractive, and journalism is so timid and weak. How else account for the almost total disregard on the part of the national press of the many persons—missing, murdered or met with death strangely—who were related to the tragedy in Dallas."

Midlothians shook their heads and grinned. Mysterious deaths? Penn's at it again. This'll keep him busy until something else catches his attention. They turned to the sports page.

It was some time before the town and nation noticed the persistent stings of gadflies like Jones and Mark Lane and Edward Epstein. In fall 1966, however, the country started to scratch. *Life* magazine, originally one of the Warren Report's loudest cheerleaders, published frames from the Zapruder film showing the president apparently reacting to a shot fired from in front. The *Saturday Evening Post*, that bastion of middle-class opinion, ran an article by critic Josiah Thompson making a strong case for three assassins. Not to be outdone, *Ramparts*, the now defunct purveyor of radical-slick, put a jigsaw puzzle picture of John Kennedy on the cover of its November issue and ran a grim-jawed account of ongoing murder in Dallas, Texas. The magazine sold out. Not surprisingly. It was compelling reading, full of violence and intrigue. It even had a hero. It was called "In the Shadow of Dallas: The Legacy of Penn Jones Jr."

One of the more breathless passages went: "Three years after the Kennedy assassination—and two years after it was allegedly 'solved' by the President's Commission—fear still walks with the man or woman who knows even part of the truth of what really happened on November 22, 1963. If Penn Jones has done nothing else, he has shown us that. . . . We saw it in the eyes of those who crossed paths with key figures in the assassination. We heard it in their voices. 'Please,' one of Jack Ruby's strippers told us. 'Don't put my name in your paper. Please. I love life too much.'"

Ramparts had been at work on the assassination for some time, but spotlighting Penn was a last-minute decision. A UCLA grad student named David Lifton had done a mammoth, meticulous analysis of the Warren Report's weak spots. As might be expected from an engineering student, it was highly technical. "A goddamn legal brief," editor Warren Hinckle grumbled. He wanted something that would get them "talking in the bars," and when he came across Jones' allegations of the unaccounted demises of 14 people who knew too much, he seized the Dallas equivalent of King Tut's curse and shoved Lifton's brief into the wings. Eight pages of the glib, glossy radical journal were devoted to reprints of fulminating editorials from the *Midlothian Mirror*. Before *Ramparts*, everyone in Ellis County knew how Penn felt about the assassination. Afterwards, so did everyone else.

The Mysterious Deaths and How They Grew

The first several deaths were the best, and the first two to be chronicled were the best of all. The night of November 24, only hours after Oswald was shot, five men met in Jack Ruby's Oak Cliff apartment. One was George Senator, sometimes called Ruby's "roommate," sometimes his "boyfriend." Two were attorneys, one a friend of Senator's and the other—Tom Howard—a friend of Ruby's, later his lawyer. The other two were reporters, Jim Koethe of the *Dallas Morning News* and Bill Hunter of the *Long Beach Independent*.

Why did they meet? What was said? Whatever the reason, it was the last night for some time that Senator was in the apartment. He slept in a different bed every night for the next two weeks. Maybe it was paranoia. Maybe not. Within a year, both of the reporters were dead. Koethe was found in his bachelor pad with his neck broken, either from strangulation or a karate chop. Hunter was shot by a policeman in the Long Beach public safety building. A few months later, Howard, seemingly healthy and only 48, died of a heart attack. No autopsy was performed.

"No autopsy was performed." The phrase came to be the coda for a series of untimely ends to people connected with the assassination. Lee Bowers, the railway man who saw the cars prowling the parking lot behind the grassy knoll, was driving to work when his own car inexplicably veered from the road and hit a bridge abutment. He died several hours later. The doctor who attended him was quoted as saying, "He was in a strange state of shock. . . . I can't explain it. I've never seen anything like it." No autopsy was performed.

William Whaley, the cabbie who drove Oswald home after the assassination, expired in a head-on collision on a bridge over the Trinity River. A man with a perfect safety record, he was the first on-duty Dallas cabdriver to die in an auto accident in 37 years. Jones went to interview the taxi company's general manager, who threw him out snarling that smart people don't ask questions.

Warren Reynolds was a used-car salesman who witnessed the shooting of Dallas policeman J.D. Tippit. The FBI showed him photos of Oswald, but he failed to make a positive identification. Two days later, he was shot in the head. He recovered and changed his mind. Yeah, that's the guy all right.

Police arrested a suspect in Reynolds' attempted murder, but released him after an alibi was provided by Betty MacDonald, a one-time stripper in Jack Ruby's Carousel Club. Eight days later, MacDonald herself was arrested for breach of the peace. Several hours later, she was found hanging from her cell in the city jail, an apparent suicide.

The mummy hand of Conspiracy reached out to claim other victims as well: Earlene Roberts, who managed the rooming house where Oswald stayed—heart attack; Hank Killam, acquaintance of Oswald's and maybe of Ruby's—throat cut; Edward Benavides, the look-alike brother of Domingo, who witnessed the Tippit shooting—gunshot; even Dorothy Kilgallen, the syndicated columnist who crowed that her private interview with Jack Ruby would "bust this case open,"—barbiturate overdose. Not every demise was suspicious, and some weren't even mysterious, but the sheer numbers were impressive, especially those labeled "death by misadventure." Even a conservative critic like Sylvia Meagher was impressed. She gave the Mysterious Deaths two chapters in her scholarly work, *Accessories After the Fact*, noting drily that "(v)iewed subjectively, the witnesses appear to be dying like flies."

Time magazine was less impressed. "A macabre and mischievous exercise in mythmaking," it sniffed, as only *Time* can sniff. The newsweekly went on to point out that Eddy Benavides had been killed in a tavern brawl, Bill Hunter by a police buddy clowning with his gun and Jim Koethe apparently by a bar acquaintance. Of the last, it buzzed like a backyard gossip that "homosexuality may have been a motive," which is no more an explanation than saying "heterosexuality may have been a motive."

Time's lame exposé only fueled the fire. A CBS camera crew showed up in Midlothian to debunk Jones by putting him on TV, a stunt that was like tossing Br'er Rabbit into the briar patch. A natural performer, Penn scampered happily ahead of these hounds and others, delighting in their outraged bays and even stopping on occasion to taunt them with new and fantastic charges. It is a game he is still at.

To judge Penn Jones by the standards of journalism is to take him more seriously than he sometimes takes himself. He is less a journalist than a journalist-provocateur. "You know how to get a mule's attention?" he asked me. "You hit him between the eyes with a two-by-four." This approach seems to put off

some of his fellow critics, who concentrate their praise on Penn's personal qualities ("scrappy," "a straight-shooter," "brave as hell") and gloss over his contributions to the cause. ("Uh, one of the first. Definitely one of the first.") These days they act embarrassed by such antics as Mysterious Deaths and gunmen in manholes. Let them. Let trudgers like David Lifton bring up the rear with their maps and charts. If they find the going easier, it is because Penn Jones was in the first wave, drawing enemy fire and getting the public's attention by whacking it between the eyes.

In the months following the *Ramparts* piece, Penn continued to fish for clues, looking for the bodies of others who were "missing, murdered or met with death mysteriously." He found them, although sometimes he cast the net a little wide, once pulling in a deceased Ruby stripper who turned up later alive and lissome.

The number had reached 24 when, in March of 1967, Penn learned that New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison had charged a local businessman named Clay Shaw with the murder of John F. Kennedy. The country was electrified. Penn was jubilant. He wasted no time contacting Garrison to offer his services. Garrison, a colorful figure who cultivated a reputation as a fighting D.A., said he could use a man like Jones. Penn took off for New Orleans and spent the next several months helping here and there, principally ferrying witnesses from Texas to Louisiana. One terrified individual, hiding underground in Dallas, trusted no one but Penn to get him to court alive.

It was a heady time. Garrison, who knew how to play to the pit, dropped heavy hints that the tentacles of conspiracy reached into the very halls of power. The press poured into New Orleans and Penn, like many of the much-abused critics, found himself bathed in the D.A.'s reflected glory. It was coming.

The killers of John F. Kennedy finally would be brought to justice.

"Hold Everything"

Professor Robert Blakey teaches law at Notre Dame now, but five years ago he was chief counsel for the House Select Committee on Assassinations. He is also the author of *The Plot to Kill the President*. I asked him where the Kennedy case stood today. Was the Justice Department or some other agency about to reopen the investigation, take action of any kind?

He paused for a long moment. I thought he hadn't heard me. Finally, he said, "The answer is that nobody's doing anything. And nobody's likely to do anything. Now or later."

I asked him how he felt about that.

This time his answer was quicker. "I think it's tragic."

The Garrison investigation eventually imploded from its own lack of substance, although not before it had ruined the life of Clay Shaw and forever consigned the assassination to the tabloids, to compete for headlines with the Loch Ness monster and the Murder of Marilyn Monroe.

Penn returned to Midlothian and took up cross and grail again, but it was a wearier crusade. He wrote and spoke and investigated, but much of the old *joie de combat* was gone. People like Hugh Aynesworth no longer even bothered to call him names.

Then Watergate leaked across the front pages and the case started to cook again. If the government had tried to cover up misdeeds in 1972, people thought, maybe it had in 1963 as well. Sales of Penn's books (*Forgive My Grief*, volumes I-IV, largely compilations of *Mirror* editorials) picked up and speaking invitations started coming in. In 1976, criticism of the case took on new authority when the House of Representatives voted to form a committee to investigate the assassinations of JFK and Martin Luther King.

Critics were skeptical. They had seen all this before, another coat of whitewash on the first one's peeling surface. Both critics and the public were surprised, however, when the committee closed its investigation in December 1978 by voting, eight to four, that "on the basis of the evidence, President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy."

The evidence that turned the case around was scientific proof of a gunshot from the grassy knoll. It came in the form of a tape made at the moment of the assassination on the open microphone of a police motorcycle riding in the presidential motorcade. To the unaided ear, the recording sounds like so much static, but Blakey and the committee engaged a team of acoustics scientists who found, through a series of ingenious tests, a "95 percent certainty" of two gunmen.

This hot news was somewhat chilled by the committee's decision that Lee Harvey Oswald was guilty anyway, that the gunman on the knoll had missed—Kennedy's backwards plunge notwithstanding—and Oswald's trusty Italian carbine had done the deed. The committee even sanctified the "Magic Bullet," that pure and perfect artifact that lone-nutters venerate like a piece of the true cross. Neutron activation tests were conducted on the bullet, comparing it with fragments taken from Governor Connally's wrist. They matched. A gunman on the knoll, the reality of the magic bullet—the committee found enough miracles in Dealey Plaza to make a dozen saints.

Everyone was confounded. No one was happy. Critics disputed particulars of the committee's work. Supporters of the Warren Report threw up their hands. The FBI sulked bitchily and the Justice Department paled at the thought of reopening a homicide 15 years cold. Justice finally handed the acoustical evidence to the National Research Council for independent verification.

The Council appointed a panel of experts to examine the motorcycle tape. It was a prestigious group, including one Nobel Prize-winner. The panel's formation in late 1980 was casually mentioned on a special "assassination segment" of a TV program called "Speak Up, America!" Watching the show was 26-year-old Steve Barber of Mansfield, Ohio. He deliberated for a few days, then decided to speak up. He wrote the panel to inform it he had found something that disproved the acoustical evidence. As it happened, he had.

"I had a copy of the police tape." Steve told me. "I listened to it for months, trying to hear the shots. One day I decided to try and make out what the voices in the background were saying. Finally, I picked out these two words—'hold everything.'"

Steve is a rock musician, a conspiracy buff and a long-distance friend of Penn Jones. He was unemployed at the time, which may explain why he spent time that no one else might have spent, and heard what no one else had heard. The voice on the tape belonged to Sheriff Bill Decker; the entire radio transmission is, "Hold everything secure until homicide and other investigators get there." Decker issued this order over a minute after the assassination, but on the tape, his voice occurs between the third and fourth "shots."

The panel of experts listened to Steve and then listened to the tape. In May 1982, it announced its findings. The police tape contained no gunshots, four or otherwise. What sounded like static was just that. The acoustical evidence was invalid.

Steve, whose contribution was mentioned in the panel's report, waited for the media onslaught. Except for his hometown paper, however, no one knocked at his door. The panel's announcement barely made back-page news. The Kennedy case—alive or dead—was no longer hot copy. It wasn't even warm.

"I had mixed feelings about getting in touch with the panel," reminisced Steve. "I mean, even if the acoustics were wrong, it was still keeping the case

open. Penn was one of those who encouraged me to go ahead and write. I know it sounds corny, but I think he's a great American. I get *The Continuing Inquiry*; I've even written some pieces for it. This November, I'm going down to be with him and Elaine."

Professor Blakey is less composed about Steve's discovery. Although he grants that the acoustics evidence is open to serious question, he also feels—as do the scientists who made the original study—that there are ways Decker's voice could have been inadvertently recorded over the gunshots, presumably sometime after the event. There are tests that can determine the matter, but the panel chose not to make them. Until retested, the police tape, although no longer ironclad, is still admissible evidence.

Does Blakey think such experiments—costly and requiring considerable expertise—eventually will be made?

"Probably not."

Without the acoustical evidence, is there still a case for conspiracy?

"Yes, and I'm still persuaded, but it's harder to persuade other people."

I brought up his book, which contends that Oswald and unknown others were acting for "elements of organized crime." If there were a conspiracy—if the mob did it—what does it mean that, after 20 years, there's still no hard evidence against them, or for that matter, anyone else?

"It means they got away with it."

"Meet Me Under the Oswald Window"

The years passed. Penn reached retirement age. He left the National Guard, where he had risen to the rank of brigadier general, and sold the *Mirror*, which had become more of a weight than a pleasure. He

continued to publish *The Continuing Inquiry*, notifying subscribers about new victims of the Kennedy curse: people mysteriously dead from car wrecks, suicide or heart attack, all without benefit of autopsy. The number swelled from 24 to more than 50 to more than 100 to the point where even Penn is no longer sure how many have succumbed.

His reputation grew as well. In 1976, a man came to Midlothian to write Penn's biography. "Nearly wanted me to death," Penn grouches, but the book, *Citizen's Arrest* (by H.C. Nash, a professor of English at East Carolina State University), is an engaging and literate work, marred only by its author's penchant for heading chapters with quotes from Shakespeare and Camus. Nash also quotes French philosopher Jacques Maritain, who met Penn on a visit to America. "A vanishing type," Maritain said of Penn. "You can always trust a man obsessed with a truth. On the side of the angels."

Others, too, were obsessed with the truth, and increasingly, Penn spent his time answering letters and phone calls from those who had heard of him and his work. One piece of fan mail was from a young woman named Elaine Kavanaugh. Penn wrote back. She replied. He wrote again. The correspondence continued until she wrote to ask to meet him. Would he take her on a tour of Dealey Plaza?

Several days later, Elaine received his reply: be there at 2 p.m. next Sunday. "Meet me under the Oswald window." Elaine sighs with the memory. "They were the most beautiful words anyone ever said to me."

That Sunday, her husband drove her into Dallas. Before she got out of the car, he cracked, "You're in love with that old guy, aren't you?" She didn't answer. She just shut the door and went to stand under the window. Penn was late, but he arrived. The first thing he did was pull the lid from a manhole and tell her to climb in. She had bought \$60 white Capri pants for the occasion and she balked. He was adamant. She pleaded. "Go on," he barked, "get in." She crawled inside.

After that day, she never stopped thinking of Penn. "The King's General in the West," she called him, after the romance novel by Daphne du Maurier. Not long after, she and her husband divorced. It was a bitter break-up—the marriage had been foundering for years—and she moved back with her parents. Her father was unsympathetic. She could stay until March, then she had to get out.

Elaine slept in the cottage where her grandmother had lived. She didn't know what to do. Her life was a shambles. Sometimes she even thought of suicide. Her father told her if she did away with herself, someone else would have to bury her; he wasn't about to. She considered taking pills and setting fire to the cottage. It would be a cremation of sorts.

In despair, she wrote to Penn, and Penn—an aging, diminutive knight in creaky armor—came and took her away. He helped her find a job and apartment in Dallas. He introduced her to his friends and fellow critics. He took to dropping by to see how she was doing. Sometimes he stayed late. After a while he started staying for the night. It bothered Elaine, a devout Baptist. Penn was married; he even had grandchildren. Sometimes people even mistook her for one. She loved him though. He was the one bright spot in her life. The King's General.

Finally, Penn and L.A. agreed to divorce. The Joneses' wealth, close to \$2 million, had been founded on L.A.'s inheritance, and Penn conceded it all to her. Except for his military pension, he was left penniless. He didn't give a damn. Neither did Elaine. Some had expected her to bolt when Penn's only attraction became Penn himself. They had misjudged.

In December 1981, the two of them moved to the house near Waxahachie, the same place Penn had once let the poor family stay. Now it was inhabited by lizards and abandoned cats. It had broken windows, loose boards and hadn't been painted since the war. The yard was full of weeds and rubbish. They cleared the yard, repaired the windows and installed water and electricity. Soon the place was fixed up. It wasn't pretty but it was livable.

They moved in Elaine's few things and Penn's hundreds of assassination books. They also moved in five file cabinets that bulged with folders on everyone from "Angleton, James" to "Zapruder, Abraham." They also moved in Penn's projector. There were always visitors who wanted to see the film. Penn had been showing it since Jim Garrison had given him a copy 14 years ago. He wasn't about to stop now.

Blow-Up

"People come from all over to see this," said Elaine, threading the Zapruder film into the projector for the third or fourth showing. "They're just drawn, like those people in 'Close Encounters.' They have to see it for themselves."

After leaving Dealey Plaza, we had crowded into Penn's car and done the obligatory tour of assassination landmarks—Parkland Hospital, Oswald's rooming house, Ruby's apartment, Tippit's death scene—the same stations of the cross Penn had shown the editors of *Ramparts* years ago. Oak Cliff, where Oswald and Ruby lived, is a dreary, low-rent neighborhood, and the sites themselves were so ordinary that I realized that any local color would have to be air-brushed in. The day was hot and Penn got lost in the rambling streets a couple of times. We were all glad when the tour was over and he headed the car home to Waxahachie.

"Home" is a frame house off a gravel road that cuts through fields of barley and wheat. The paint is peeling badly, but in most ways it is a tidy, comfortable habitation where Penn and Elaine live in a sort of genteel poverty. The furniture is worn, but there is an air-conditioner for the bedroom and a well-stocked refrigerator in the kitchen. Some of the food comes from the truck garden which Penn works regularly, more for exercise than out of need. There are two friendly dogs and a mama cat and kittens. The kittens

are allowed inside, where they crawl up Penn's pants leg to nestle in his lap. Sometimes he acts annoyed at this, but secretly he is tickled.

Midlothian is a 20-minute drive away, and although Penn keeps in touch, he rarely sees his family. The phone rings several times daily, usually researchers calling long distance to chat or inquire about new developments. Visitors are less frequent, and often several days pass without the pair seeing anyone. Sometimes they don't want to. "Sometimes it gets to be too much," Elaine confided. "Sometimes we can't work on the newsletter or do research or anything. We just sit and grieve."

Elaine was having trouble with the projector, and while she fiddled, I decided to ask Penn the Big Question. "Who do you think did it?"

"I think there were nine gunmen," he said.

"I mean, who do you think was responsible?"

"I think it was a goddamn military coup!" snapped the former brigadier general. "A *coup d'état*! The brass and rich SOBs that run this country didn't like what Kennedy was doing, so they had him killed. You know, I helped to fight a war to keep this country a democracy. I left a lot of friends over in Europe, and they all died for nothing."

"Don't you think the truth will come out?"

"It has come out! And nobody's paid any attention. They got away with it. They've won. Look at all the people they've killed. They only reason they haven't killed me is because I'm not important enough."

"I met John Kennedy. He autographed his book for me. I met Bobby, too. I went up to Washington and made an appointment." His voice started to tremble. "I told him what I thought, and he listened. I don't know if he believed me, but he listened."

Penn started to blink. Tears suddenly spouted from his eyes. He turned and strode from the room. Elaine and I gazed dumbly at the door.

"It's all right," she said quietly. "Sometimes he gets like this. Give him a minute." She left the projector and pulled out some pictures. "Do you want to see the sniper?" Remembering that there were several,

she added, "The one on the knoll."

We looked at a photo taken within a second of the fatal head shot. In the picture's foreground is the limousine. In the background is the knoll. If you look closely, you can see something poking just above the wall topping the knoll. It may be a man's head. It may only be the play of shadows. It was impossible to tell. Elaine also showed me several enlargements, but they only added to the image's ambiguity. Like Antonioni's "Blow-Up," the picture becomes an exercise in creative perception. Find the Indians. To some people, the outline is clear. All I could see were splotches

of light and dark.

Penn still had not returned. I asked Elaine where *she* had been when Kennedy was killed.

In the fifth grade in Hamilton, Texas, she replied. She remembered that her grandfather had always thought it was a conspiracy, but her father had thought that was just so much bullshit. During her teens, she had read some books on the subject, but didn't become actively interested until the final years of her marriage. In a sense, the assassination distracted her from her own problems.

Another more pleasant distraction was Princess Di.

An ardent "Di watcher," Elaine collects books, magazines and memorabilia of every sort on the princess, Prince Charles and the baby. She shyly showed me some.

I asked if she ever wanted babies of her own.

"I used to, but the way the world is these days, I think it would be a cruelty."

I asked her what she would do when the day came, as it had to, when she was alone.

"I'll just try to carry on the work. Keep trying to get the truth out. It'll be harder. Without Penn." She was pensive. "I'll probably just go back to being what I was, a hermit." Her face brightened as Penn reentered the room.

He was smiling. "You drink bourbon?" he asked me.

From time to time, I admitted.

He clapped me on the shoulder and turned to Elaine. "How 'bout gettin' us a drink, little girl?" She scurried away, returning shortly with two full glasses.

Penn picked up a reel of film and started to put it on the projector. "Got something I want to show you."

I remarked that he had already shown me the film, more than once. Abraham Zapruder's 8mm home movie is a silent, grisly document. No one who sees it soon forgets it. I had seen it several times that day and that was enough.

Penn was having trouble with the projector. Elaine took over. He sipped his drink. "You haven't seen this version," he chortled to himself. "This has sound."

"Sound?"

"Dan Rather. He threatened to sue me if I kept showing it."

"Dan Rather threatened to sue you?"

"I used to show it when I did lectures. His lawyer sent me a letter a few years ago."

"What did you do?"

"I didn't pay any attention. Never heard another peep." He cackled gleefully at the memory. "I wish he *had* tried to sue me!"

"But why did he want to sue you?"

"Because I showed him for the liar he is!"

The Day Dan Rather Lied

Copies of the Zapruder film are widely shown and sold now, although technically it is still the property of Time-Life, which purchased it from Zapruder after the assassination. In the years that followed, the 22-second movie was guarded from public view on grounds of taste. Critics suggested that there were darker motives, contending that it showed the shots came not from behind, but from in front of the president. *Life* had printed selected frames, but until the Garrison investigation, only the Warren Commission and a privileged few had seen the film itself.

One of them was Dan Rather. A young CBS reporter stationed in Dallas, he was on hand for the Big Story; he handled himself well, and, afterwards, his career never flagged. On the evening of November 24, two days after Kennedy was shot, Rather was allowed to view the Zapruder film and report on national television what he had seen. It was a good idea. Rumors of conspiracy were still in the air. Oswald himself had been shot that morning and the country was a little jumpy.

Rather's account was calm, lucid and soothing. On one critical point, it was also wrong. The president did not, as Rather said, fall "forwards," but backwards. Forwards meant a shot from behind, the Book Depository. Backwards meant, maybe, the grassy knoll. Maybe two gunmen. Maybe a conspiracy. Rather put the "maybes" to rest.

Years later, critics discovered a tape of his narration and dubbed it onto an edited version of the film. Penn advertised it for sale (\$40) in a 1973 issue of the *Midlothian Mirror*. The ad read, in part: "The voice of Rather was taped two days after the assassination as Rather did not show, but gave a dishonest inter-

pretation of the Zapruder film. In our film, his voice is tied to the action, which makes it easy for one to understand how Rather became the White House reporter shortly after the death of President Kennedy."

A less sinister explanation can be found for Rather's error. What he saw in 1963 was a fuzzy, jiggly print more open to interpretation than Penn's enlarged, computer-enhanced version. Still, others saw similar prints without making the same mistake. It may be that Rather, convinced the shots came from behind, saw what he expected, instead of what is there. Penn had written that Rather has since claimed he made "an honest error." I see no reason to believe it was anything else. Penn Jones believes otherwise.

Elaine announced she was ready. I resignedly flipped the light, and once again we watched the motorcade. This version was in slow motion, and for the first time I noticed how mechanically the president waved. No doubt he had to spend a lot of time waving. I also heard the familiar, sober voice of CBS News' anchorman as he intoned: "*This reporter has just returned from seeing a home movie which clearly shows the president's assassination as well as the direction from which the shots came.*"

By now I knew the film by heart. The president waves. The crowd waves back. The limousine starts to turn.

"*The president's black Lincoln automobile makes a turn off of Houston Street in Dallas onto Elm Street right below the window where the three shots were fired. It got about 35 feet from the building.*"

Kennedy brushes at his hair. He disappears behind a freeway sign.

"*President Kennedy had just put his right hand up to the side of his right eye. . . .*"

Kennedy emerges from behind the sign. Both his arms are raised, as if he's choking.

"*At almost the instant he put his hand to his eyebrow, the president leaped forward just a bit. It was obvious he had been hit, although you had to be looking very closely to see it. Mrs. Kennedy did not appear to be aware that he was hit.*"

Connally turns his head, puzzled.

"*Governor Connally, in the seat just in front of the president, seemingly heard the shot and turned in such a way as to expose his entire shirt front and chest.*"

Connally stiffens; his cheeks puff; his hair flies up. He collapses.

"*At that moment, a shot very clearly hit the governor. As the governor fell back into his seat, the second shot—the third shot total—hit President Kennedy.*"

Kennedy's head splits open.

"*And, there is no doubt there, he went forward with considerable violence.*"

He is hurled backwards against the seat. The limousine picks up speed. Jackie crawls frantically onto the rear, trying to retrieve a fragment of skull. A Secret Service man jumps onto the car just as it races away.

"*The complete scene that I have described to you covered exactly 20 seconds. It is very clear that the president was hit. Governor Connally was hit. And the president was hit again.*"

"The End," I thought. Thank God. The film, though, had been vengefully edited to repeat the crucial moment. Once more, I watched Kennedy's brains being blown out and his body crashed back as Rather gravely asserted: "*There is no doubt there, he went forward with considerable violence.*"

The scene was repeated another time. Kennedy's head explodes. He falls back. Rather says: ". . . Forward with considerable violence."

Again. Kennedy is killed. He falls back. This time Rather just says: ". . . Forward. . . ."

Again. Kennedy is killed. He falls back: ". . . Forward. . . ."

The room was hot. I began to get queasy. I felt like the droog in a "A Clockwork Orange," tied to a chair, eyelids taped open, watching an endless loop of carnage and death as the nation's Most Respected Newsmen mindlessly repeated his cavalry charge: ". . . Forward. . . ."

Suddenly, the projector jammed. "Turn it off, little girl!" Penn cried. "It'll burn a hole in the film."

The trick of the eyes that makes us think we're seeing movement when we're really seeing 24 still frames a second is called the persistence of vision or, sometimes, persistence of memory. It's an optical illusion; the image lingers after the picture has gone. Elaine reached to turn off the machine, but before she did, the illusion briefly failed and on the screen I saw John F. Kennedy, the 35th president of the United States, frozen in the act of dying, his head in a nimbus of red. It is an image that, for many, still painfully persists, twenty years after the lightning struck.

Pilgrim's End

I drove down Elm through downtown Dallas. It was Sunday and the streets were empty, the banks and department stores closed. Except for a few ragged souls shambling along the sidewalks, the city seemed abandoned. I saw a man without a shirt. I saw another without shoes. If Penn had been with me, we probably would have stopped to offer them a ride, assuming they were going somewhere.

Merle Haggard was on the radio:

When this whole world war is over,
And the dream of peace comes true,
We'll all be drinkin' that free bubble-up,
And eatin' that rainbow stew!

The bullet that slew Camelot put an end to a lot of American dreams, although most of them took longer to die. Never mind that Camelot was largely illusion, as mythical as the idyllic little outpost of Americana that *Redbook* constructed from Midlothian. The dreaming is what matters, as essential to the health of a society as it is to a human being. *Redbook* no longer prints silly, syrupy stories about bright young people starting new lives in friendly small towns. A recent issue featured articles about drug abuse, divorced mothers and the fear of violent crime. Since 1963, this country has prospered in many ways, but in dreams it is poorer. And no matter how long we wait, Kennedy is not going to come.

I pulled the car into the parking lot behind the grassy knoll. I wanted to take a last look before heading home. The sky, cloudless earlier in the day, now promised rain. It was almost twilight and, for once, there was no one in Dealey Plaza.

I strolled over to the picket fence. A number of its boards were missing, torn loose by souvenir hunters. Below, cars were zipping down Elm. The line of sight from the fence to the street was clear and direct. It certainly seemed a likely spot for a gunman to hide, a possibility that the House Committee's acoustics experts had said was a fact. But Penn's friend Steven Barber had managed to shoot down the acoustics evidence. That, of course, didn't prove that a gunman wasn't on the knoll; it just proved that the acoustics didn't prove it. And so on. It was still possible.

Perhaps Dealey Plaza was a place where everything was possible. Maybe it was like an amusement park's House of Gravity, a seemingly normal space where natural laws go haywire, where a man will lurch toward the bullet that hits him; where another man can be in two places at once, or divide and seem to be double; where nine gunmen can shoot the president, then disappear like smoke. The observer shapes the reality, and maybe here every model of reality is true. Maybe. Whatever the case, the realities of November 22 continue to be as elusive as the smell of gun smoke on a grassy knoll. I had come to Dallas looking for clues; I was going away with smoke.

"We come here as often as we can," Elaine had told me in her soft, childish voice. "We're here in the heat. We're here when it's cold. We're here every November 22. The TV people are always by the monument (a memorial designed by Phillip Johnson two blocks away), but we're right here. Where it happened."

"The holy spot is where the martyr falls," added Penn Jones, the atheist, without a hint of irony.

Others see Kennedy's martyrdom more literally. After leaving Penn, I had gone to talk with J. Gary Shaw, a Cleburne church architect and long-time assassination critic. A quiet, thoughtful man, he first paid homage to Penn ("a trailblazer"), then talked at length about his own research, speaking with insight and sophistication over a range of topics. At the end of the interview, I purchased his own privately printed book, *Cover-Up*.

The book is a primer, designed to acquaint non-buffs with the complexities of the case. It proceeds along the familiar lines of eyewitness testimony, photographic evidence and so forth until the last chapter, when it drops its documentary tone and appeals to the reader to accept Jesus Christ before the end of the world. This sudden shift into evangelism, which staggers the unwary browser with its apparent irrelevance, is coupled with an examination of America's political and economic woes, tracing them to its moral decay. To Shaw, the solution to the murder of John Kennedy is ultimately linked with the country's spiritual redemption. Like Penn Jones, he makes him-



The other side of the infamous grassy knoll. Who stood here on the day John Kennedy died?

self an easy target for a glib aside, but it is almost inevitable that the enigma of November 22 would take on a metaphysical cast.

"Finding who killed Kennedy has all the elements of a religious quest," Josiah Thompson told me. Thompson, a one-time assassination critic as well as philosophy professor, is one of those who has put the search aside, but he referred me to something he had said years ago. Interviewed in *The New Yorker*, he commented at one point: "There's a fantastic way in which the assassination becomes a religious event. There are relics, and scriptures, and even a holy scene—the killing ground. People make pilgrimages to it. And, as in any religious event, what happened there isn't clear; it's ambiguous, surrounded by mystery, dubious."

I thought of the house with the peeling paint on the outskirts of Waxahachie, the old man and the woman whom people took for his granddaughter showing the Zapruder film on their cranky projector to pilgrims from New Jersey and Oregon and elsewhere; taking long-distance calls and writing their newsletter; keeping the memory of Dealey Plaza alive. For those who come to Dallas to visit the day of November 22, Penn Jones has become as much a point along the way as the Book Depository or the grassy knoll. "A great man, a part of history," Elaine calls him with a worship that borders on idolatry. Now he is also part of the myth, the man who discovered the Mysterious Deaths, the keeper of a counter-history of an American tragedy, as much icon as iconoclast.

Sometimes he must tire of this role. Sometimes he must want to be just another old man enjoying the sun, to stay home and work his garden and sip bourbon and play with the kittens and put the books and files and that goddamn film in the closet. The phone rings, though, and he answers it and makes another appointment to take someone else to Dealey Plaza, where he will make the visitor descend into a man-hole in his own sly version of an initiation rite. Such is the province of myth-keepers.

I watched the cars drive through the plaza for a while. The light started to fade and a few drops of rain fell. The drivers turned on their wipers. I could see the faces of the ones in the nearest lane. They never gave me a glance, hurrying on their way to other parts of town, other towns.

I went back to my own car. A copy of *The Continuing Inquiry* lay in the lot, where someone had tossed it for the wind. Most people who leave Dealey Plaza will never come back. Penn Jones has never left.

Books on recent American history generally dwell on the assassination as briefly as possible. Unable to draw a moral or political lesson from Dealey Plaza, historians note it and move on to the Vietnam War, which provides an abundance of both. Dealey Plaza is a shoal in the river of events, not part of it. History has passed it by. And those who stop here run the risk of being marooned.

I got in my car and pulled out, taking Elm Street toward the triple underpass. Passing by the grassy knoll, I took one last look. Someone, I noticed, was standing where I had been. The figure's head poked above the picket fence, watching the cars pass down Elm. Or at least so I thought. The light was dim and it really was impossible to tell. ☆

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