

THE TEXAN:
RUSTY RHODES

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For some, the need to understand what really happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963, became a very personal matter.

It was very hot and very dry in Palm Desert, California, and Rusty Rhodes' car wasn't working. So I picked him up at his workplace and drove him across town to the trailer park where he lived. As the details of Rusty's odyssey unfolded, the trailer park seemed an increasingly absurd locale to be having our discussion.

I was born George Wayne Rhodes, but it seems that anyone with the last name of Rhodes has the nickname of Dusty. My father was Dusty Rhodes, and people had an inkling to call me Little Dusty. When I was about six years old I decided I didn't want to be Little Dusty, and made it Rusty. It's very difficult to try to force a new name upon your family and friends when you're only six years old.

When I was born, my mother was 16 years old and my father was 22. He was working as an accountant for the Katy Railroad in Dallas during the day, and pursuing his Master's degree at night at SMU in marketing and merchandising. My mother's side of the family are — passionate — Creole people. My father was from a family that was very educated. They lost everything in the 1929 Wall Street crash, so they became dirt farmers in East Texas. My father had this tremendous desire to make it, to get it all back, and because of that my younger brother and younger sister and I rarely saw him when we were children, because he was always working. It wasn't as bad a situation as it might sound, because my

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grandfather, my mother's father, moved in to fill that role. He was a wonderful fellow -- a woodsman, a true survivalist.

A large portion of Dallas is built on landfill because it was swampy creeks and marshes. I enjoyed being by myself a lot, and I had a swamp that I could disappear into and no one would come looking for me. I had a cave that I shored up with lumber from building sites. The trees formed a cathedral effect. Some of the best recollections of my life, to this very day, are poling through those green, frothy waters in a jon boat that I built.

My father became a salesman for the Ronson Corporation, the cigarette lighter people. In 1962 he received a promotion to General Sales Manager, so we moved from Dallas to Los Angeles where he ran the L.A. office. My mother, who had been a journalist, gave up her career when we moved. We leased a house in Santa Monica from Stan Laurel. The garage was full of all his mementos, and for six months he kept coming back every week to get things. We'd go out and help him dig through all this stuff, and he'd give us little things. His wife was a real slave driver, always harping. But he was a nice man, and he would tell us stories for hours about what Hollywood was like in the twenties and thirties.

When I came out to Southern California, I felt all the guys were acting like idiots, fruitcakes. They all had long surfer hair and oversized shirts, and none of them carried knives. I couldn't figure out how people got by. I was 15 years old and my classmates in Dallas were already getting pregnant, dropping out of school and dying in knife fights.

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When I was growing up in Dallas, the only avenues of upward mobility were to be an athlete or a hoodlum. I tried to be an athlete. I broke several bones in my back trying to play football. My nose was broken, my feet were broken. It took me a year to recover. Then I bought a black leather jacket with a lot of rabbit feet on it. Went out and got some black Levis and some black engineer boots and tried to be a hoodlum.

They had this cute little practice in Dallas called "curbing." Once you worked on somebody real bad, you opened their mouth, put it on a curb, and stomped on the back of their neck to break their teeth. I could never curb anybody. I guess I was generally a failure as a hoodlum.

When my parents moved to California, it was the best thing they ever did for me. I didn't know until then that it was okay to ask yourself questions about the universe and personal philosophy. The moment I got out there I noticed that there was this kind of force about the beach and the ocean and surfing. I could feel it in the way the kids would talk about it: there was something about the sea that drew them. I didn't understand it at first, but it wasn't very long before I was completely enamored as well. The beach, for me, was a tremendous liberating factor.

When we first went to the beach, I couldn't believe how proud people were of their bodies. In Texas, everybody always wore clothes, even on a 105° day. And here were girls walking around with bikinis. I thought, God, this is great! I was embarrassed by my body, but all of these people were walking around feeling so good about themselves, and it didn't take me

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long to pick up that attitude.

My parents were very strict. They were members of the Church of Christ, which is so strict they think the Baptists are liberal. I had to be home by 10 o'clock. But surfing was a clean sport. For the first time in my life I could take off for weekends with no parental supervision. I would go sleep on the beach with friends and surf and watch the sun go down.

It was at school, 9th grade, that I met my best friend, Eric. He was certainly the funniest-looking person in the class. He was about five-foot four, he weighed 160 pounds, and he wore a size 12½ double-E shoe. He had a short, parted haircut, but he had a cowlick right in front, so his hair would stick straight up in front. He wore bright Hawaiian shirts with cotton pants, and colors that usually didn't match. I couldn't believe anybody would go to school this way. Eric looked like a funny person just walking down the street. The whole image really intrigued me. I decided I've got to know this person, because here's somebody that doesn't care about social statements. Here's someone who just kissed it all off. I really admired his fortitude. Then, when this funny, little person would open his mouth, I realized he was also one of the most intelligent people I've ever met.

Eric's family was progressive Jewish, and my family was conservative Christian, but both of us had home lives that were not great, and we decided that we did have a lot in common. I don't know if we ever said this openly, but it was a quiet understanding that we needed each other's strength to get

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through life. When we started high school, Santa Monica High School, I moved in with his family.

We had a nice home, a charge account at the liquor store, and a pool in the backyard. We didn't date, because girls would come over. There weren't any other 16-year-olds around with such luxuries. Eric and I kind of drank our way through school. We only went to school regularly on Fridays to take tests. We would ace our tests, get A's, and never do any homework. So we got C averages and it all worked out. Eric's mother thought as long as we were reading Plato, and other classical philosophers, which we were, then it was alright. She was the type of lady that really built you up and made you feel very, very special.

So Eric and I went through high school as best friends, and there were several tragedies that kind of reinforced the idea that he and I had to face the world together. Both of our mothers had alcohol problems, his father had moved out, and my father was still gone a lot. Then, when we were in the 11th grade, on the way to school, Eric hit a woman in a crosswalk. She saw a friend of hers and darted across the street. Eric struck her. As we were standing there with the ambulance and the police, a school bus came by, and kids stuck their heads out and screamed, "Murderer!" That really hurt Eric bad. The woman died three weeks later. It made our own bond even tighter. Eric lost his license for a year. He wasn't charged. But my buddy was broken, and you couldn't have punished him any worse than the thoughts in his own mind.

November 22, 1963, was a bright, sunny day in Santa Monica. We were about to take our noon break, when the word came out

over the PA system that the President had been shot and that Governor Connally of Texas had also been shot and that he was possibly dead.

I couldn't believe it. I had such tremendous feelings for John Kennedy that I couldn't deal with them. People would come up to me and ask me about Dallas. I told them, "The Governor's a great guy. I talked to him. I'm really sorry that he stopped that bullet." I think I even said, "I don't care about the President." I didn't really feel that way, but if I was to say what was in my heart, I was afraid I would start crying and sobbing and not be able to control myself. I had to put my face on and appear calm to protect my image.

After lunch I went to History class, and since it was known that I was from Dallas, the teacher asked me if I was familiar with the motorcade route. I got up to the blackboard and made a little diagram of downtown Dallas and how the streets go. Then it came across that the President was dead. There was an athlete in the class, a great big guy. This fellow was sobbing. He lost complete control of himself and picked up his desk and threw it at me. He missed, but he made a big hole in the wall. The teacher hit a little button, and immediately the counsellors and the assistant principal were up there. They sent me home for three days. People really wanted to hate Dallas and anything in it or from it.

I went to the beach to think about what all of this meant. In a panic, you don't think straight. I thought that because the President had been shot, that Nixon was going to be President! I'm thinking, Oh my God! I was really concerned about the country. I went back to my parents' home, and we learned about Lee

Harvey Oswald. My family's so huge back in Dallas that it always seemed like we knew everybody in town. I think I asked my mother twenty times, "Does anybody in the family know this guy?" But nobody did.

On Sunday, we were all getting ready to go to church, when it came on the TV that Jack Ruby had murdered Oswald. Jack Ruby -- I knew who he was. I had a friend who owned a bar in East Dallas by the name of The Casbah Club, and his partner was one Jack Ruby. I had heard about Jack a lot because he was the "fixer." He got the liquor license and this, that and the other. He could soothe it over with the cops. You could run girls because Jack could fix it with the cops. He was a cruel fixer who hated the world, tremendously self-centered, did what he did for himself or his own sense of self-importance. I couldn't envision the man being motivated by Caroline crying and Mrs. Kennedy having to come back for a trial. No, I couldn't see that side of the man. We're talking about a man who worked in Chicago as an enforcer for the Scrap Iron Handlers' Union and for Frank Nitty. So we're not talking about a "patriotic innkeeper" here. "Patriotic innkeeper!" When I heard that TV explanation, that was the first red flag.

I went to Dallas around December 14th, three weeks after the assassination. My Grandfather Rhodes was ill, so we were going to make a family showing of it. My aunt, who was a Dallas socialite, and her husband, who was a very prominent attorney, had a cocktail party -- basically the shaker and mover crowd. At that party I spoke with an old, old family friend, a surgeon who was usually the one who put the medical package together for the DA's on murders and such. He had

reviewed all the notes the day of the President's death.

The doctor was aloof, didn't recognize me. He was extremely nervous and agitated. I had never seen him like that. His wife offered an explanation to my aunt that he had not been himself since he came back from Washington, where he had been interviewed by the FBI and other groups. He was under strict orders not to talk, as all Parkland Hospital doctors were, and he had not been right since his return. I knew this man very, very well. I couldn't imagine what kind of pressure or situation would have him react in such a way. This is an emergency room surgeon, a fellow that sees everything. All of his personal notes on the case were seized, and he was treated roughly. This is someone who went to fine schools and was of a good family, and never been treated roughly in his life. That's when the second red flag went up.

At this point I became very interested in the President's death. I got the feeling that possibly something was wrong, and it deserved explanation. I heard, through a friend, of a newspaper editor in Midlothian, Texas, named Penn Jones, Jr., who was conducting his own work into the events of the assassination, to learn if the official explanation was just a cover-up and if there had in fact been a conspiracy. He came out and spoke at a conference at UCLA, and I started conducting some interviews for him in Southern California.

My senior year, my girlfriend, who was a year younger than I was, got pregnant. She happened to work as an office helper for my dean at high school, so the dean promptly released me from school. The mother of the girl was a fanatical Christian, who disowned her daughter and went down to the DA and had rape charges filed against me. I decided that the time was right to return to Dallas. I gave the girl a plane ticket and \$300

and told her to meet me in Dallas and I could care for her until she had the baby. Instead, she went downtown to Queen of Angels Hospital, where pregnant women have babies and place them in adoption. The rape charge died on the vine when the girl refused to testify.

In Dallas I stocked shelves at night at an A&P Market, and worked for Penn during the day. At first it was mostly basic, light work: tracing people, mostly witnesses, through county records, credit sources, neighbors. Pretty much the basic investigative techniques that either a journalist or a homicide detective would use.

It was during this time that I met Officer Roger Craig, who was one of the more important witnesses of the shooting of the President. He was Policeman of the Year in 1962. He had been in Dealey Plaza all morning and afternoon to secure it, and had noted movement of spectators, cars, traffic, etc. At first Craig's statements about the case did not appear startling, but once you knew the case, they became very important. He talks about a light green station wagon picking up Oswald, while the official version has him leaving by bus and cab. Because he insisted on talking to the media, and because he was a cop with very good credibility, Roger Craig was fired by the Dallas Police Department, and ostracized. After one attempt had been made on his life, I became a live-in with the Craig family. I stayed with the family off and on. ————— Eighteen years old, revolver, three-piece suit. I was scared half to death, but trying to look professional.

I returned to Los Angeles and expected my girlfriend to have had the baby. When I visited her, I discovered she was

almost ten months pregnant. We went to the Downtown Hilton, and were having dinner there when her water broke. I didn't know a whole lot about women and babies, and I thought when the water broke, that's it, the baby comes immediately afterwards! So I fainted.

A waitress revived me with a cold towel and said, "You'd better get the hell to the hospital!" I drove about 75 miles an hour through the streets of downtown Los Angeles, with the police roaring behind me. Finally I let them catch me, and pointed and said, "Baby, baby." The chase ended up with a police motorcycle in front of the car, and they escorted me to the hospital. About 20 hours later, she had the baby. She named him Rusty.

As I understand it, an architect and his wife in Orange County adopted the child. I do wonder sometimes what it would be like for a 20-year-old man to show up here one day.

Back in Dallas, I intensified my work for Penn Jones. There were approximately 150 primary witnesses to the shooting of President Kennedy. I probably interviewed 60 of them. I was young enough to go out and do this kind of foolhardy work. Because of my age, and because I was a local boy, I was not threatening to these people. Most of them were extremely private, God-fearing people who felt like something was wrong and that they ought to tell their story. They had witnessed an event and told the truth, and then a resulting press release by the

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Police Department or by the DA's office would say that they were mistaken or lying or seeking publicity.

Dallas had an official tour guide that would take people through Dealey Plaza and give them the official Warren Commission story. I would stand out there and catcall him. "What about this? What about that?" Eventually my side was much more interesting because I knew so much more than the other guy, and I'd win all the people over. After three days they sent a guy out there who told me they would get a writ to remove me unless I left on my own. I said, "These are public lands here." He said, "Don't give me this legal bullshit, Boy." The man's an attorney from the DA's office -- what are you going to say?

At that point I set up a pattern where I would work in Dallas for 8 or 9 months and then I would disappear to California for 3 or 4 months. I lived a completely schizophrenic existence. In Dallas I had a sidewall haircut, mohair, three-piece suits, and a big gun. I lived an extremely disciplined life. I never even smoked a joint.

Then, I would go to San Francisco, wear defraction jewels stuck on my forehead and a headband with feathers stuck in to try to cover up the short hair, and walk around being a freak. I guess I needed some avenue of self-expression that was completely different. I would take a tremendous amount of LSD and walk around Golden Gate Park everyday. I stopped going to the Haight-Ashbury when methedrine became the drug of the streets and all the good cheer evaporated into the woodwork.

Finally, I became tired of running around Dallas. Two witnesses that I knew well, and liked, met their demise, and I was upset. I was tired of the threats by the police, who

were embarrassed by the assassination and wanted the subject to go away and die. I was becoming an individual that I didn't like. I was too hard. I decided there was a lot of bookwork for me to catch up on, some 18,000 pages of the Warren Commission Report which I had not familiarized myself with.

So I came back to California and did some serious studying for several months. I went back again in '67 and helped ———→ transport a witness to New Orleans for the Jim Garrison trial. Before the witness, Richard Randolph Carr testified, he was stabbed ———→ in the stomach on the street when he went out to get something to eat. But he did live and testify. Garrison tried to prove a conspiracy to murder John F. Kennedy and to prove that Clay Shaw, a local New Orleans businessman, was involved. When the jury was questioned after they rendered a not guilty verdict, they said that a conspiracy was proved, but that Clay Shaw's involvement was not.

Back in California again, I started building files and meeting the other Warren Commission critics and started an exchange of information. I was doing a lot of odd jobs at the time, working on boats in the Marina, but mostly I was living off the college trust fund that my grandparents had set up. I would get the class cards and send them to the attorney that ran the trust. He would send the check, and I would immediately withdraw from classes. It made it rough later when I really went to college.

My parents lived in a good neighborhood, and were starting to feel a lot of police pressure, mostly cops coming by and asking my mother questions about my whereabouts. That's when my mother's drinking became paramount. She paid the

price, in many ways, for what I was doing. Years later we would discover, it wasn't paranoia, that the FBI had told the Santa Monica Police that I was possibly dangerous and they wanted information. _____ > The local police department, wanting to look good to the feds, spent a lot of time on it. The harassment became very, very bad. You can't believe what happened to this little upper-middle class family who had always done things by the book, because their eldest was involved in something that was not fashionable.

The straw that broke the camel's back came one day when I had dropped by to see my mother. I laid down on the couch to rest, and fell asleep. I woke up to hear my mother screaming. She was in her robe, and there were three men with suits in the house. Two of them had a hold on her. Ronson used to make these large, terrible-looking rosewood candles with butane in them. The first thing I did was grab one of these things and hit one of the men on the head as hard as I could. The guy went down like a sack of potatoes. We started fighting, and the guy I'd knocked down hit me on the head with a flashlight or a gun barrel. I started to get up -- and there's three pistols pointed at me.

They said, "You're going to jail." And I said, "For what?" They said, "Assaulting an officer." So they brought me out to this unmarked squad car. My mother came running out, screaming, "Let him take his jacket! Let him take his jacket!" This one detective became so nervous about the way my mother was reacting, that he turned around and backhanded her -- knocked her to the ground. Blood was drawn. Our neighbors across the street saw it because they were out in front watering.

I was handcuffed in the back of the car, and I said, "You're going to pay for that. You drew blood on an unarmed civilian, a five-foot tall woman that weighs 95 pounds." He did the only thing he could do: he put her under arrest to protect himself from a civil charge. They charged her with "interfering with an officer's duty."

When we got to the jail, my mother desperately needed her Librium. They held it in front of her cell and wouldn't give it to her. They tortured her: "Is this what you want?", and they called her crazy.

My father got home that evening, and the neighbors told him what happened. He came running down there and they released my mother to him. Then he came back and got me. My father was really confused. He'd always lived by the book. He was used to donating Ronson lighters to the Policemen's Ball for door prizes. My mother had flipped out in the jail cell. She was home for a couple of days, sedated, then she went to the hospital for eight months, and we couldn't see her for four of those months. It was a real terrible event. When I finally got to talk with my mother, it turned out they had told her that I was with the Black Panthers and the Communist Party, and that I had these files dealing with a planned insurrection. It was absurd, but I did learn what mattered to them, and it came in handy later, when I got my induction notice.

When I took my draft physical, I brought with me all these doctors' letters. They knocked them all down. They ask you to fill out this white sheet of paper and on the back they ask if you have ever taken any drugs. So I wrote down that I had taken every drug known to man. They sent me to the psychiatrist and

I described memory loss, and situations where I would come back to with blood on my hands. That was fine with them. I tried everything. So I was very scared, because the Army let us know the FBI fellows were there for the people that refused, to immediately take you into custody.

When it became apparent to me that I was going to pass through everything, I noticed that most of the room was blacks. So I started talking very loud to the blacks nearby, something to the effect of, "You know what they're going to do? They're going to take my black brothers here and they're going to train them to be the most efficient killers on the face of the earth, and send them to Vietnam, and these white men are still going to be raping their mamas!" Half the place went "Right on!" with a resounding boom.

So I got on top of a trashcan and started really going to town with whatever I could come up with. Mind you, I was wearing nothing but my underwear and my Cuban zip boots with the stacked heels. I looked like a complete idiot. But the brothers were great: "Let the dude talk." A scuffle broke out between the authorities and the blacks, and I got hit in the side of the head with a club. I was thrown into a room and told to, "Get your clothes on." Two minutes later, the door opened and six marines grabbed me, walked me to the front door, threw me out, and told me never to come back again! That one worked.

In 1969 I started doing investigative work for various attorneys -- mostly Movement cases. By this time I was familiar with some pretty dirty stuff -- body mikes, parabolic mikes, surveillances. I was hardened, and I knew what I was doing.

I also started going to Santa Monica College on a part-time basis. The following year I ran for office and was elected Speaker of the Assembly, which was like president of the student body. We established an experimental college with 28 classes and we won several community service awards for bringing people into the college, like little old ladies who came for the class on breeding roses.

Of course we had a class on political assassinations. I got myself a good budget and I was able to bring in speakers from all over the country. The class started getting a lot of publicity and finally grew to about 200 people every Tuesday night. After two years, I was entrenched in a position of power, and the school, to get rid of me, awarded me a transferring scholarship to move on! So I did.

I was approached, and kind of sidetracked, by a group called The California Community College Student Government Association, that represented all 104 community colleges within the state. With the 18-year-old vote having just become a reality, this represented a tremendous voting block. Because I had managed the budget so well at Santa Monica, I was brought up to Sacramento and offered the Executive Vice-Presidency. I took the job and worked there for a year in the state government under Ronald Reagan.

It was an exhausting and maddening job, but I did learn that if you would take the time to learn the protocol, that the system would respond. I started getting a good feeling about democracy, and I got the idea that eventually we would reopen the Kennedy case due to popular pressure.

I came back to Santa Monica and opened an investigative office, with another office in the Mission District in San Francisco. Then I teamed up with a man named Lake Hedley, who was the former chief of homicide in Clark County -- Las Vegas. Our first case together was the investigation into the televised gunfight that killed the members of the SLA, the Symbionese Liberation Army, the people who kidnapped Patty Hearst. We were hired by the families of the deceased to tell these parents what had happened to their children from the time of the kidnapping up to the time they died in the shootout. It was quite a tall order. It was a one-year-long investigation. When we ran out of money, both of us used up all our own savings to continue, because we felt we were doing something that was pretty important.

The Los Angeles Police Department had said approximately 2000 rounds were fired in a hotly contested firefight. I went out into the area the day after the shooting occurred, with my camera and my tape recorder. Having been trained in ballistics analysis, we didn't find any evidence of a "hotly contested firefight." We didn't find evidence of more than 50 rounds being fired by the SLA, but we did find evidence of in excess of 6000 rounds being fired into the house by the L.A. Police Department. They said my figures were all wrong and that I was obviously a Marxist because a friend of mine was a Marxist. The L.A. Times went on for about a paragraph about my character. But in an L.A.P.D. internal investigation booklet, which we got a copy of, they admitted to firing in excess of 6500 rounds. So we did our work well, and they were forced to eat their words.

We never did really resolve the entire matter. We did ultimately find out that the SLA had no political philosophy, that it was a confused operation with a meglomaniac escaped convict at the top. Donald David DeFreeze, aka Field Marshal Cinque, was not indeed a revolutionary. He was a cheap turnover punk for the L.A.P.D. Here's a black man who'd been arrested nine times on weapon charges -- armed robbery, forced rape, things like that -- and the man's continually probated. He had been in Soledad prison for two weeks when he was given a job on the outside servicing a power generator. This is a job that's reserved for men that've been in there for five years. DeFreeze walked away the next week.

As for Patty Hearst, if all of our information was correct, she was probably playing revolutionary. Not to the point of picking up a gun or anything like that. She just had a mild, rich girl interest in the things around her. I certainly don't believe that she deserved what she got. She was another victim of that whole tragedy.

After the SLA case, Lake and I were broke and disgusted. We had been followed by helicopters several times. Once we were coming out of a restaurant in Hollywood with two journalists, and there's two men with crowbars trying to break into Lake's car. It turned out they were FBI, intent on getting his notes on the SLA. So there was a lot of repression and harrassment. Lake and I did a few more cases together and then he decided to retire.

In 1975 I got into a little trouble in San Francisco. My office was in a gay neighborhood, and a guy came up to me and

wanted to find his roommate because the roommate had taken his stereo. This guy had been a good street tip, so I asked all around, finally found out where the guy was, and gave the information to the fellow. It turned out that the guy hadn't stolen the stereo -- he was a lover who'd rebuffed him and left. The street tip went over and murdered him.

I felt pretty rotten, and the San Francisco Homicide Department made sure that I felt rotten. They were going to lift my license and I'd be lucky if I didn't go to jail as an accessory. They didn't want me leaving town.

Two weeks later, I left my apartment to buy a pack of cigarettes at a bar on Market Street, and right as I left I saw a man struck by a vehicle travelling 60 miles an hour. I ran out to offer whatever aid I could. He was still alive, had a pulse, so I cleared the breathing passages and kept him going until the ambulance got there. He died en route to the hospital. But a little German man saw the accident and ran after the car. The driver was drunk, and the car was so mangled he couldn't see through the broken glass. He drove three blocks, got out and escaped on foot. But the German man found the car, wrote the license number down, and gave it to me.

The driver turned out to be a city official. So I went down to the police department, homicide, the guys who'd put me over the coals. I gave them the driver's name, and asked them what they were going to do about it. The man had not been charged. They started making every excuse in the world for him. I wouldn't let up. Finally they said, "Look, we'll make a deal. You'll never hear about yours, if we never hear about this one." I said, "Okay."

I closed the office in San Francisco shortly thereafter and was only doing Movement cases in L.A. I took a side job doing custom stereo installations and became manager of the store, but I couldn't see myself staying in retail sales, so I left.

Meanwhile I did a lecture on the John F. Kennedy assassination for the Legal Society of Loyola University, a small, liberal arts college in Los Angeles. People really responded and they subsequently asked me back for three occasions. After my fourth appearance, I was approached by members of the Political Science department and offered a salaried position as a staff consultant, as well as free tuition for undergraduate work. I accepted it, and spent a year there. I was able to do my Kennedy research in an academic setting and actually be paid for it. We started a citizens' drive to petition Congress to reopen the matter of John Kennedy's death.

I was contacted by Notre Dame and asked to come to Indiana to do my speech. It was a sold-out audience, so they asked me to come back and I did. During one lecture, one guy in back kept loudly yelling encouragement. I assumed it was some radical student, but when it was over, it turned out to be Digger Phelps, the basketball coach. I ended up staying there two weeks and did a week-long series of lectures for the History Department.

During my stay at Notre Dame, I met the famous football coach, Ara Parseghian. Remember, he did some Ford commercials. Well, this motorcade of Fords came to pick me up at the hotel. It was the linebacker coaches. They took me over to the athletic complex, and I did a private lecture for Ara Parseghian.

It was like meeting the Pope. At the end, Parseghian said, "Can you do me a favor?" I said, "I'll try." He said, "Find out why I was on Nixon's enemies list." I did try, but I never could find out. The closest we could come is that he once attended an event with Paul Newman on behalf of a halfway house for alcoholics. I don't think there was any particular logic to that list in the first place.

I was nominated for the senior fellowship by the senior class at Notre Dame, and after that I was contacted by Fordham. This is kind of the Catholic circuit. My lecture at Fordham really popped everything out in the open, because the old Robert Kennedy staff network showed up for the lecture. It became a very important moment in my life, because we were getting closer to power and to really doing something about it.

We had a press conference the next day at the Waldorf-Astoria and all seven New York City Congress members committed to vote to reopen the case. By this time I'd been in touch with Congressman Henry Gonzalez of San Antonio, Texas, who'd written House Resolution 204 calling for a reopening of the case. My associates, Delphia Arrowood and Greg Roebuck, and I began pinpointing those districts where swing votes were needed. We'd go to a town for free, we'd rent the local hall, do all the buildup with the radio and TV people, have the lecture and then stay in town for several days afterwards. Then we would try to leave a small support structure that could continue after we were gone. We'd give them a copy of the Zapruder film of the assassination that shows Kennedy getting shot from both back and front. We'd supply them with fact sheets and an organizers' manual. It was a beautiful thing watching this direct democratic process work.

We'd pick up votes by the week, just by targeting districts.

I was contacted by the American Program Bureau, the largest speakers' agency in the country, and I went to work speaking on college campuses. I averaged 4.3 lectures a week for 2½ years, and traveled over 250,000 air miles. It took a terrible toll on me. Doing the same thing every evening, and all you see is a hotel room. It's difficult living that way.

When the resolution passed and the House Committee was formed, I stopped lecturing and ended up on a farm in Illinois for three weeks, trying to figure who in the fuck I was. All I had done for 2½ years was get up in front of a podium and give the same introduction. Everytime I spoke I got genuinely mad, and I'd get emotional everytime I'd see that film of Kennedy getting shot. I knew I'd done a great job, and felt good about the work I'd done, but, boy, on a personal level it was the only time in my life really that I felt like I had no idea what my identity was.

I was slated to be one of the investigators on the committee. Then there was a power struggle, and Congressman Gonzalez, who had shown such tremendous bravery and resilience, was deposed as the chairman. In the mixup that followed, I was knocked out of my job as well.

The Congressional investigation ended up being a terrible job. The scientific work was good, particularly the acoustic analysis, but the investigative techniques were very sloppy because there were no real investigators. Instead of hiring some good, hardboiled Miami and New Orleans organized crime street detectives, with a few Kennedy researchers thrown in,

they got a bunch of Harvard and Princeton law students and young attorneys. This was their first big assignment in public service, so the quality of people was not that good.

I'll give you one for-instance: One of the more interesting figures in the Kennedy assassination was George DeMorenschild, a White Russian, who was arrested in 1943 while walking along Galveston Island drawing detailed pictures of the gunnery emplacements. He befriended Oswald in Dallas, became his mentor, paid his rent. DeMorenschild was visited at his home in Florida by an investigator for the House Committee. The man knocked on the door, a servant answered, and he said, "I'm an investigator for the U.S. Congress. I'm here to talk to Mr. DeMorenschild." The servant said, "Mr. DeMorenschild is not here. Can you come back later?"

The investigator came back later and DeMorenschild was dead of what was later ruled a self-inflicted gunshot. Cardinal rule in investigations: You don't reveal your identity until you're talking to the person you want to talk to.

So I was disappointed by the investigation. It cost \$6,000,000, and we heard about that \$6,000,000 for years. On the other hand, the committee did turn in reams of information on organized crime. You can't look into the assassination of John F. Kennedy without looking into organized crime. But that money was a big deal. Given the pragmatic nature of politics, to go searching for truth for truth's sake, is just not a good explanation in Washington. The Congressional card had been played, and it can never be played again.

After the House Committee, I returned to Los Angeles. I was completely intrigued with a new instrument called the

Psychological Stress Evaluator, PSE. It was a new type of polygraph that did not have to touch your body. It scanned your central nervous system. It could go right into the Islands of Langerhans, where stress is born. I found this tremendously exciting. I also thought it was about the scariest thing I'd ever heard of. I had to have one. It was still within the realms of Army Intelligence and the CIA, but was just starting to come out. You had to be in a police department or a DA's office. George O'Toole of the CIA, who had used a PSE to analyze the Oswald tapes, wrote me a letter on CIA stationery saying that I wished to purchase one and to attend a class in the instruction of such. They were having these classes in Los Angeles.

I went to those classes. I had long hair, I have to remind you, in a ponytail, and I'm in there with narcs and Drug Enforcement Administration guys. They thought I was really something. I wouldn't say who I was with. Everybody else, it was, "Oh, I'm from San Jose Narcotics," "I'm from San Francisco Vice." They'd ask me, "Who are you with?" and I'd say, "That's not important." It was a four-week class and I graduated with flying colors. Former Head of U.S. Army School of Counterintelligence, Col. Charles McQuiston, one of the creators of the PSE and the class instructor, really liked me. He was associated with George L. Barnes and Associates, the highest-class private investigations agency in L.A., and I was hired by them. Their offices were in a four-story home with a circular driveway, tennis courts, pool. They had 20 employees.

There was a guy there named Joe who was Director of Operations. He was my boss. A former Green Beret, who was a gung-ho type, wore nice suits, and had no feelings for me because

I was never in the service and I wasn't gun-happy. About two months after I was hired, we were out on a case together. The Chemical Workers' Union was striking against Lever Brothers, and somebody was going through the hierarchy of Lever Brothers and bombing their homes. It had happened twice, so we knew who was next on the list.

We moved the family into a hotel and we set up in their home. I had low-level light video cameras at all the windows. We had cars on both sides of the house, and I was inside the house. We were looking for a yellow car. About four o'clock in the morning, a yellow Dodge Dart comes driving slowly down the street. Checkpoint A calls it in. I turn on all the video cameras and recording devices. The car comes up to the house and it stops. Somebody gets out and walks up the sidewalk. Joe, who was in a car covering the street leaves his position, which he never should have done, and comes running into the house to be with me.

I was standing there looking through the window with the video monitor. I couldn't see very well, but I could hear the footsteps. All of a sudden we could see somebody throwing something. I looked over and Joe had drawn and cocked a .38 and was about to fire. I elbowed him as hard as I could and knocked him down.

It was the paperboy! Can you believe that? The car was right and everything. He was going to shoot a 14-year-old boy. And this guy had been treating me like I was a piece of trash.

I was promoted to Vice-President, and my first assignment as Vice-President was to fire Joe. I worked for Barnes for

a period of 2½ years, and I was paid very well. I wore shorts and Hawaiian shirts to work. I did my dictation next to my wireless phone out by the pool. I had my own private shower and bath and closets. My company car was a Mercedes 400 -- the big sedan. It was like being in a TV show -- a very class operation.

Barnes' work was always big civil cases. He worked exclusively for the American Tobacco Corporation. Everytime somebody sues because a loved one died of lung cancer, they hire Barnes. They'll spend \$200,000 on an investigation to squash a little summons and complaint, because once somebody wins, there's millions of people that can file. They did such deep background investigation that they would go back to see what the mother of the lung cancer victim had ingested during her pregnancy. I'm sorry to say that when you go into court with such volumes of material, even if it's not specific evidence, the court's impressed. They never lost one.

There was one case I worked on for over a year, and that was the Howard Hughes' will. We were hired by a law firm representing the matrilineal family, and my job was to disprove the Mormon Will. For an entire year I did nothing but study Howard Hughes. Read everything I could find, talked to his old test pilots, his old engineers, everybody I could. The only thing that gave credence to the Mormon Will was the fact that Melvin Dumar had insider information that no one would know unless he had really picked up Hughes in the desert and given him a ride, like he said.

Well, I found a great uncle of Dumar's, and I talked to this old guy -- missing teeth, about 75 years old in Gardena. He

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said, "Yeah, it's really something what happened to old Melvin." He says, "You know, my wife used to work for Hughes back in the thirties."

I said, "Tell me about it. I hear he's really an interesting guy." He said, "Yeah, she had that book that nobody ever got to read." I said, "What book was this?" And he says, "You know when Hughes flew around the world, that co-pilot, Ed, he wrote a book about the whole thing. Howard wouldn't let him fly the plane because he wanted all the glory of doing the whole thing himself. So he kept taking stimulants, and Ed just sat there and listened to Howard talk the whole time. Ed wrote a book, it was a handwritten manuscript, and he tried like hell to get it published, but nobody would take it. We had that thing over here for years."

So that's where Dumar got it all from. It was beautiful. An unpublished manuscript that nobody even knew existed. So we were able to disprove the Mormon Will.

Shortly after that, I had a bad dispute with Barnes, and ended my association with him. It was also around that time that my mother died. August 8, 1980, at the age of 49. The specific cause of death was heart failure. It was my opinion that it was brought on by the effects of long-term alcoholism. I bore a tremendous amount of guilt over my mother's death. She died alone in a ramshackle little apartment. It didn't set well at all. We'd been corresponding regularly, exchanging letters once a week, but I felt like I should have been there. That incident with the cops in Santa Monica was the determining factor in her mental health history -- and I'd always felt responsible for that. But you eventually have to deal with the

fact that the burden is gone, and no matter how much guilt you project on yourself, it's not going to change anything.

After I left Barnes, I opened up an office again in my own name. I started doing dope recoveries. Big dealers got hit, and they'd want their stuff back. They'd come to me and I'd PSE everybody and find out who was lying. The first one I did, I got almost a complete return. Boy, they heard about that. You talk about a grapevine. All of a sudden I had to get an answering machine. "Rhodes, I hear you do recovery work -- on unusual items!"

I didn't want to be in that business, and was given an offer by a very rich firm in Orange County. They were interested in the PSE. Through many, many meetings, I learned that they ran massage parlors that were really whorehouses. They wanted the girls to be able to say, in a miked room, "Are you a cop?" And when the customer said, "No," they wanted that "No" analyzed, so they would know right away if she could go ahead and pitch the john, or the red light would go on and she would give a straight massage and get the guy out of there. I really got scared to death. Those guys were organized crime, and they were killers. One of their guys was working on a subsonic transmitter to scramble the brainwaves of critical witnesses. That's when I packed it in. I put it all down.

Through the years, the seediness of investigations, the slime, got to me. I felt as if I were as bad or worse as the people I was dealing with. Things that you did weren't normal. Your back against walls watching everybody in a restaurant. Running these machines. You see everybody as marks or johns,

and I got tired of seeing the world that way.

When I finally got out of the business, I realized my childhood was cut short by events that occurred in my life. I chose to allow them to happen, but the fact remains that at 18 years old, I wasn't driving around in a '57 Chevy. I had a sidewall haircut, a three-piece suit, and a big gun on, and I was living a very disciplined, almost monastic life. I discovered I really wanted to go back and get in touch, to try to live part of that life I missed, and just do what I wanted to do.

The first thing I did was to buy an interest in a treasure expedition. I took off for a year and went through Central American filming Mayan temples with a screenwriter friend of mine. We spent eight weeks in Panama sampling local ladies and bill of fare, having exciting times. Then we took off on this ship and lived on Greater Inagua Island, 40 miles off the coast of Cuba, and spent six months diving every day, looking for treasure.

I got back and just started smiling again. Going to the beach, trying to enjoy things. In the past, I'd stepped on a lot of people because I was very busy, or maybe I was abrupt with them. So I tried to settle a few of those and tell them I was going to be a different person now.

I met Kimberley, my wife, in Marina Del Rey. She was going with a young fellow I knew, and they had just ended their relationship. She was looking to rent a room in the area, and I had a room to rent in a house I owned in Venice. She didn't like my looks and I didn't like her demeanor, so it didn't happen. Six months later I ran into her, and the room

was open again, and this time she took it.

I couldn't believe the disgusting men that she went out with, all these swinging types from the Marina. So I decided, I've got to do this girl a favor. She needs to go out with somebody who's decent. We started dating mildly at first, but we cared a lot about each other and began dating seriously. Before we left town and moved to the desert, I sold the house in Venice and started buying houses, fixing them, and rolling them over. Kimberley did that with me. Even though she was raised on a six-acre compound in Benedict Canyon, she was willing to roll up her sleeves and get dirty along with me. I like that.

Right now I'm a person who wears a multitude of hats. I write computer programs for billing and inventory control -- application programs. I have a cleaning service here in Palm Desert that cleans condos. I'm an antique dealer. On the weekends, I cook at the Palm Desert Tennis Club, where Kimberley is the office manager. I really like to cook, and we're very slowly moving towards opening a restaurant.

At this moment, career doesn't mean anything to me. I know at my age I should be thinking about it, but I'm really just happy and very content with my marriage, and with the changes in my life, and I'll see about that later. We've got a child coming, and now I can look at a small child and I can pause to reflect on the beauty of that little creature, whereas years ago I could not. I can see beauty now in my life that I could not see before. I'm still so ecstatic about that, that I'm not really worried about money yet. I'm going to try to live my life on a good, positive note, and pause to take the

time from now on to reflect on the beauty in the world around us, and that's something I never had time to do before.

After we had concluded our conversation, Rusty and I were joined by Kimberley, and my wife, Flora. With our little boy running around, and with Kimberley being very pregnant, we talked at great length about prepared childbirth and the joys of parenting. But as the evening drew to a close, I couldn't help but ask Rusty his informed opinion on a question which has never stopped bothering me: Who really did kill John F. Kennedy? Although Rusty's active involvement in the matter had ended several years earlier, it was obvious that his interest in the mystery had not diminished.

As for Lee Oswald, he was a man with an inflated ego, a troubled young man who was certainly the type that could be manipulated and guided. I could see that crazy little wimp firing shots that day. He couldn't have fired them all. He didn't have the training, and the rifle was a mess, but I would not be surprised if Lee Oswald did fire shots that day. However, there is no proof that he did. Either way, he was a patsy, in my opinion. His background raises a lot of questions, particularly his defection to the Soviet Union and his smooth return to the United States. We need to go to the offices of Naval Intelligence and get the files on his recruitment, and I'd like to go to the Soviet Union, sit down with somebody from the KGB, open up their file on Oswald, and talk about it.

However, the assassination of John F. Kennedy will never be solved until someone takes a long, hard, dismantling look at that symbiotic relationship that exists between the CIA and organized crime. That unholy marriage poses, in my opinion, the greatest threat to this democracy that we've ever witnessed. The Kennedy brothers had to be stopped. No Attorney General in the history of this country has gone after organized crime like Robert Kennedy. The Kennedys were too rich to be bought and they were too brash to be intimidated. Even their old man couldn't stop them, and he was in bed with a lot of those people.