

THE ASSASSINATION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY:

Real Gardens, Real Toads—Some Speculations on Secrecy—and the Dark Night of the CIA
by Shana Alexander

The letter was forwarded to me by CBS News. Underneath a demurely garlanded *O* traced in Wedgwood blue the letter read:

June 8, 1975

Dear Ms. Alexandria:

There was indeed a conspiracy in November 1963 in which my young son Lee Harvey Oswald was allowed to take the blame.

Sincerely,
Marguerite C. Oswald

How swiftly she swam up from the depths of my memory—a pathetic, clownish eccentric in glasses and a funny hat. A publicity seeker and flinger of wild charges. A nutty, slightly sinister, big-nurse type. Not a woman to take seriously.

That was 12 years ago. Today one feels differently. Twelve years ago I believed the Warren Commission Report, believed that President Kennedy had been killed by a single, deranged assassin acting alone, believed that this man in turn had been killed by another deranged assassin acting alone—Jack Ruby. I do not necessarily believe that now. But my belief survived for a dozen years—survived the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and of Martin Luther King and the shooting of George Wallace; survived Vietnam and Cambodia and Chicago '68 and Jackson and Kent State; and lasted even through much of Watergate. My belief held steadfast much longer than most people's.

Three years after President Kennedy's assassination, the Gallup and Harris polls reported that two thirds of the American people refused to accept the conclusions of the Warren Commission. But like most professional journalists, I did accept them. I wrote off the skeptics and doubters as a pack of conspiracy nuts, assassination buffs, loonies and paranoids babbling about a second gun, a third Oswald, conjuring up James Bond plots and secret links between Cuba, the CIA and Cosa Nostra—flaky people, like Mother Oswald, not to be taken seriously.

Then the CIA revelations began to surface, leading first to the formation of the Rockefeller Commission (*Continued on page 109*)

"Real Gardens, Real Toads" . . . Clockwise, beginning at far left: Richard M. Helms, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency (1966–1973), now ambassador to Iran; the late J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (1924–1972); James J. Angleton, retired Chief of Counter Intelligence, CIA; William Egan Colby, former director, CIA (1973–1975); the late Allen Dulles, former director of the CIA (1953–1961); James R. Schlesinger, former U.S. Secretary of Defense (1973–1975).



measure myself by, a person who did not exist when I turned my back. Me, mv, mine. *My mother.*

I brought the toast and coffee to the table, not knowing what to say.

"I'm sorry this visit hasn't . . . gone as well as I'd hoped, Megan," my mother said, staring into her coffee mug. "Maybe another time . . ."

"But it's all been my fault—trying to impress you, not thinking about what you wanted to do."

"No, no." My mother looked sad. "I know I shouldn't have brought up Charlie and I know you think I was interfering, but, Megan, I didn't want you to be alone." She sighed and brushed her hair from her face. "When your father died I felt so lost, so helpless. I didn't want you to go through that too. I thought maybe even a bad marriage was better than that kind of loneliness."

When I thought about that later, I disagreed with it. But at the time, that was not the point. I patted her hand—awkwardly, for displaying emotion is difficult for both of us—and felt close to her for the first time in a long while. "I'm glad you've come," I told her, and I meant it.

Perhaps you envision this ending with the two of us walking off into the sunlight (or into the airport) hand in hand, friends forever.

That also is not quite right.

I am not sure that we will ever be friends. In some ways we are too much alike, in other ways too dissimilar. But we have, I think, made peace with each other. We visit each other now, talk to each other, and sometimes we even express our mutual affection. And that is a sufficiently happy ending for me. **THE END**

Karen Hanson, who holds a master's degree in journalism, has worked in news and public relations. This is her first published fiction.

ASSASSINATION OF KENNEDY

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And later to the inquiries directed by Senator Frank Church and Congressman Otis Pike. This was different. I took the spook stuff seriously from the very beginning; and as time passed I began wonder why.

What was I looking for? I knew the intelligence establishment was overblown and overblown. I knew it tapped phones, read mail, engaged in dirty tricks; that it mixed in the internal affairs of other nations, propped up "friendly" governments and tried to "destabilize" others. I knew that for a generation or more Congress had preferred to look the other way rather than exercise the appropriate and necessary control, and I knew the dangers to democracy when police power is allowed to range unchecked.

In short, I knew that there was little in these new CIA headlines that we didn't already know. So why the eagerness for the morning paper, the thirst for the nightly news? At first it was the magnetism of the subject matter, the

Do You Look Older Than Your Husband?

When you're running a home, raising children, doing all you can to help your husband keep ahead in business and, these days, perhaps holding a job yourself, sometimes you're so pre-occupied that you don't pay close attention to how you look. Then one day you realize that you look older than your husband,



the one man in the world you hope most to please.

You don't like it. Most likely he doesn't either. Probably every man likes his wife to look her best, perhaps because it makes *him* feel more attractive. So if you seem to grow older-looking while your husband seems to grow more distinguished-looking as his hair gets slightly grey at the temples, it's undoubtedly time you discovered the secret of a unique beauty fluid, a secret known to younger-looking women from many parts of the world.

Beauty connoisseurs discovered this remarkable beauty fluid, known in the United States as Oil of Olay beauty lotion. An abundance of pure moisture, with tropical oils and other emollients, soothes away dryness, the dryness that makes aging little lines and wrinkles all too noticeable. Notice the way your skin virtually drinks in the skin-loving liquid. Feel your skin grow softer and smoother within moments after you gently it on your face and throat. See the difference in the radiance and lustre of your complexion.

Oil of Olay penetrates the so-noticeable surface of your skin incredibly

quickly and deeply. And there's never ever a greasy after-feel. So of course it's marvelous under makeup. If you like to leave your face feeling free and easy, Oil of Olay gives a dewy, radiant glow, even without cosmetics.

The beauty fluid is compatible with your skin and works hand-in-hand with nature to help maintain the oil-moisture balance necessary if you're to look as young as you can. Oil of Olay, which acts like the skin's own moisture in easing dryness, helps retain your own natural moisture in the skin, where it works to help make skin softer and more supple.

Make Oil of Olay an important part of your beauty ritual. Every morning, of course, whether or not you use makeup. Again, faithfully every night at bedtime, so that it can work beautifully during silent hours of sleep. Any other time during the day when you again want to ease aging dryness and importantly increase the moisture level of your skin.

You will soon notice yourself looking your youngest. How nice for your husband. And for you.

Beauty Secrets. When you're dieting (and who isn't?), denying yourself the pleasure of delicious food, you deserve a little pampering. More frequent applications of Oil of Olay during diet time will let you feel a little self-indulgent. You may well achieve both a younger-looking face and figure.

* * *

Want to assure a pleasant homecoming? Then give yourself a fifteen minute "vacation" by taking a relaxing bath before your husband returns from work. Soothe Oil of Olay on your face and throat before you bathe, and again afterward. You'll feel relaxed and ready for the pleasures of the evening.

* * *

Each time you apply Oil of Olay® to your face and throat, smooth the beauty fluid right up to your hairline. (Don't worry. It's so fast-penetrating and non-greasy, it won't "slip" into your clean hair.) It's a sad mistake to frame your younger-looking face with an area of dry older-looking skin.

pull toward secrecy itself. To think the unthinkable, discuss the unmentionable, poke around the untouchable, is a pleasure very hard to come by in these days of bared souls, spread-eagled account books, full-political-disclosure laws and full-frontal-nudity art. Very few forbidden subjects remain. The secret world of the secret agent is the last taboo place left.

Marianne Moore once described poetry as the art of creating imaginary gardens with real toads in them. The secret agent lives in exactly the opposite landscape—real gardens, imaginary toads. What can it be like in there?

As the year wore on I found myself temporarily distracted from these speculations about gardens and toads by new doubts about the Warren Commission Report. More accurately, I found myself wondering why it was that so many “rational, responsible” reporters like myself, including nearly all my professional colleagues and friends, had so long refused to listen to the assassination nuts and conspiracy freaks. Who and what were we afraid to take seriously? Ourselves? I voiced my doubts to James J. Kilpatrick, the syndicated newspaper columnist who is my opposite in our weekly “Point-Counterpoint” exchange on the CBS-TV program *60 Minutes*. It was these comments that triggered the instant response from Lee Harvey Oswald’s mother.

Admittedly my new doubts were based on old and circumstantial evidence: suggestions that Oswald may at one time have been an undercover FBI agent, that a so-called “second Oswald” may have been operating in New Orleans and Mexico City, that more than one set of fingerprints had been found in the Texas School Book Depository; evidence that at the time of the President’s murder the CIA was already heavily into the assassination business in Latin America and elsewhere, sometimes with the helping hand—the Black Hand—of the Mafia; evidence that some original information about Lee Harvey Oswald had been hushed up by the Dallas police, and that other information about him had been deliberately withheld from the Warren Commission by the FBI and the CIA.

I was not the only person with newfound doubts. The recent CIA revelations had convinced even a member of the Warren Commission staff, Ohio Judge Burt Griffin, that back then the country had been told something less than the truth. The climate of sheer puppy-dog belief that existed ten years ago in America is almost inconceivable today. In 1965 *Life* magazine had headlined an insider’s account of the Warren Commission’s findings: MOTHER’S MYTH: OSWALD WAS A PAID U.S. AGENT. Implying that Marguerite Oswald was in fact a 100-per-cent nutball, the writer boasted that the commission had “the sworn denials . . . of men like FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and Secretary of State Dean Rusk. We quizzed personnel from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow,” the article continued. “We sent our own men into the agencies involved to study their old personnel files. We were, and we are now, convinced that Oswald was never

an agent for the U.S. Government.” The author of these stanch reassurances was Michigan Congressman Gerald R. Ford.

In the past bloody decade the FBI, the CIA, the White House and Government itself have lost credibility. Recent history forces one to consider that maybe the conspiracy buffs were right. Personally I’d hate to discover that last year’s paranoid nut is next year’s Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reporter, but that’s a chance recent history forces us to take. Ten years ago it was difficult to doubt the conclusions of the Warren Report. Now new studies of the Report are under way in both the House and Senate. The very same items we were once unable to doubt we are now unable to believe.

Read the Warren Report again.

- It is difficult today to believe that all 52 witnesses were mistaken who testified that at least some of the shots came not from the Texas Book Depository behind the car in which the President was riding, but from the grassy knoll in front of him.

- It is difficult today to believe the so-called “magic bullet” theory: that one single shot struck President Kennedy in the back, came out his neck and hit Governor John Connally in the back, smashed through Connally’s rib, came out his chest, struck him in the wrist, wound up in his thigh, and was later conveniently discovered on the Governor’s stretcher in the hospital.

- It is difficult today to believe Oswald could have hit the moving target at all from the book depository window. He had been a poor shot in the Marine Corps. He was right-handed, and the clumsy old single-shot, Mannlicher-Carcano rifle had a left-handed scope. None of the three National Rifle Association marksmen hired by the Warren Commission to re-create the shooting was able to hit even a level, stationary target within the required 5.6 seconds, the interval that movie films proved had elapsed between the first and the third, fatal shot.

- It is difficult today to accept it that within three years of the assassination 17 witnesses to the murders of Kennedy, Oswald and Dallas Police Officer Tippitt would die under curious circumstances. Five died of “natural causes”; 12 were victims of murder, suicide or fatal accidents. The actuarial odds against this happening have been reckoned at 100 trillion to one!

- It is difficult today to accept that the President’s brain, removed after autopsy and preserved in formalin because the pattern of its wounds was crucial to proving the “magic bullet” theory, has innocently disappeared from the National Archives building.

- It is difficult today to accept that the two photographs of Oswald holding a rifle, which the Dallas police say they found in his garage the day of the shooting, are photographs of the same man, or even photographs of Oswald at all. The man in one picture is six inches taller than the man in the other.

- It is almost impossible today to accept the Commission’s murder timetable: that Oswald was able to rearrange

the shield of boxes he had set up around the sixth-floor window from which it was said he shot, wipe his fingerprints off the rifle, hide it, run down four flights of stairs to the second-floor Coke machine and be found there by the police calmly sipping Coke only 80 seconds later.

The truth is, today it is difficult to accept any FBI or CIA testimony or evidence at face value. Remember, the Warren Commission had no investigative staff of its own; all its field work was done by FBI or CIA agents. Remember that J. Edgar Hoover admitted withholding certain files from the Commission. Remember that while then-CIA Director Allen Dulles claimed he was telling the truth when he denied Oswald had ever been a CIA agent, he also admitted that, yes, he would lie under oath to protect the CIA. So indeed would any CIA man! Then what was truth? Real gardens, imaginary toads.

Marianne Moore’s toads are truths, of course, which is why the world of the secret agent must be just the opposite of the poet’s. The spy lives in a real garden with imaginary toads—a world of double agents, dealers of doubt, smugglers of truth, speculators in rumor, hoarders of dirt, spendthrifts of lies. It is a garden whose only signs read KEEP OUT, NO ENTRY, BEWARE THE DOG! The public is emphatically *not* invited. Nor are the public’s representatives welcome—that is, the Congress—save to rubber-stamp what’s going on anyway.

Inside this garden the gardeners make their own rules, sit in judgment on their own crimes, write and break their own laws with no accountability to anyone save to their one god: “national security.” But even this god is at least sometimes false. The recent nose-to-nose confrontation between Congress and the White House questioned the value and competence of secret intelligence reports, notably on the eve of the Tet offensive and later of the 1973 Yom Kippur war, when the President was wrongly assured that there was no danger of attack.

It seems obvious here that former CIA Director William Colby was struggling to protect not national security but the CIA cover-up of its own incompetence, as well as various abuses of power by intelligence officials. Deadly poisons were stockpiled in the garden in direct contravention of Presidential orders; frightening, sometimes-fatal drug experiments were carried out; mail was opened, phones were tapped, civilians were spied on illegally and in wholesale batches; underworld liaisons and assassination plots were commonplace—and all this has been kept continually watered with billions of dollars of uncounted and unaccountable taxpayer dollars.

Looking back at the Warren Commission Report from this CIA-conditioned vantage point, one finds there such a volume of evidence to contradict the conclusions of the Warren Commission that one can see the Report itself as a kind of conspiracy by the Government and its investigative agencies to suppress

or ignore any evidence of a conspiracy by assassin or assassins unknown. Not evidence that in any way linked the FBI or the CIA with the assassination of President Kennedy, but evidence of numerous shadowy links that appeared to exist between these agencies and Lee Harvey Oswald and between the FBI and Jack Ruby.

Whether these links did in fact exist is no longer of major importance. What is new and important is not the evidence but the doubts about it. What has changed is the climate. What has cracked here is belief itself—belief in all institutions, not just in the thoroughness and—yes—*honesty* of the 888-page Warren Report, handsomely bound and reassuringly stamped with the trusty U.S. seal. From its inception the purpose of the Report was double. First, it was necessary to find out exactly what had happened. Second, it was necessary to reassure the nation that the moment of danger had passed. This twofold purpose was always the flaw, the crack in the credibility of the Report: One document could not reasonably be expected to be a thorough job of police work and a giant security blanket for the nation.

The crack that began in 1963 had widened and become a chasm by 1975, a Grand Canyon of doubts. At the bottom of a tangled bone yard of shattered beliefs lie the decade's news events: the assassinations of the President's brother Robert Kennedy and of Martin Luther King; the attempts on the lives of other leaders, from George Wallace to President Ford; increasing doubts about the wisdom of the Vietnam War, doubts that finally forced President Johnson to give up his office, doubts that led directly to the massive disaffection of the people, and especially the young, and helped the "turn on, tune in, drop out" drug culture to flourish; doubts that led to active revolution—the Weathermen, the bombings, the urban despair that became riots in Watts, Newark, Detroit, Boston; outbursts of psychopathic violence such as the Manson murders and the Symbionese Liberation Army's hokery, confused politics of idealistic anarchy, which began with the murder of School Superintendent Marcus Foster, accelerated with the kidnaping of Patricia Hearst, triggered the assault by the Los Angeles police against the SLA holdouts in a burning house and will end God knows where. By the time the Vietnam war had "wound down" through Cambodia and the Christmas bombing, the national honor itself seemed to teeter on the brink of the chasm. With Watergate it fell in. From now on everything was poisoned, nobody could be believed, anything was possible.

I think it no accident that the politician most popular today among his constituents is California's Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr. Brown is an austere, icy figure who seems to me to understand the national illness better than any other politician. He understands that the fundamental problem in this country is that the people have lost confidence in all the institutions that traditionally nourish and protect them, including that overarching insti-

tution called *government*. He understands that the only way to restore that necessary measure of equilibrium which will permit our institutions to function again is to recover the regard of the major political constituency in this country—all those people who have become so turned off, they don't even bother to vote; that crucial majority (56 per cent in the last California election) which Brown calls "the constituency of no confidence."

There is only one way to regain that confidence, and that one way is through truth. Turn over every rock, ask every question, examine every toad. Don't just reopen the investigation of President Kennedy's death. Test the "second gun" theory in the Robert Kennedy assassination. Look again into the killing of Martin Luther King, and ask anew where convict James Earl Ray got his money and how he could have acted alone. Ask how it was that dim and dippy Arthur Bremer was able to shoot down George Wallace. Find out how Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, who appears to be everybody's next-door psychopath, could creep so frighteningly close to President Ford; how Sara Jane Moore, a woman of some concern to the San Francisco Police Department, could be free in a crowd to fire a pistol at him. Ask every question. Open up the garden; examine all the toads. Ask *yourself* what you can believe.

A member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee once told me that whenever a witness testifying in closed session told the senators he had the information but couldn't reveal it, he was automatically assumed to be either faking or lying. This is a pretty solid assumption, too seldom made by most of us. We are too easily cowed by self-proclaimed experts. "If you only knew what I know," they murmur, and we nod gravely. "Ah, if we only knew what *they* know . . ." (about Vietnam, about the atom bomb)—*we* being the public and *they* being the experts, the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Chiefs, the CIA, the President.

Except that the hindsight of history tells us that they didn't, entirely, know. As one comes to realize that most executive command decisions of necessity are made on the basis of incomplete or inaccurate or misleading intelligence information, the more one dares to question, to turn over toads.

"Secrecy itself frequently gets in the way of rational examination of our intelligence," says Representative Otis Pike, drawing on his 14 years' experience on the Armed Services Committee. It gets in the way at every level, top to bottom. Secret organizations are run on a "need-to-know" basis. Each man knows only as much as he needs to know to carry out his bit of the operation. But when the spooks apply the need-to-know rule to the man at the top, to the President, to protect him from knowing the dirty work his own men are up to, that's trouble.

The man at the top has an overriding need and duty to know everything be-

cause he's in charge. The buck stops here, as President Truman said, or you face the horrifying prospect that it doesn't stop anywhere, that free-lance assassins are loose, mad dogs out of their masters' control. Something like this may already have occurred in the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, perhaps elsewhere. Though, of course, one doesn't know. The man and woman at the bottom have an overriding duty too—to explore the garden, look at toads.

What does the secret life do to the man? Isn't the secret a terrible burden to have to carry? Sometimes I imagine the man as a kind of stone urn or stoppered jar, and the secrets as a powerful liquid that eventually must corrode and eat away at the jar itself. On TV, the CIA's Colby, Helms & Co. looked to me like men who have contained the acid too long. And in the tight face of James J. Angleton, the former head of the CIA's counterintelligence group, one saw a man not only self-contained but also self-embalmed.

When a man becomes an initiate, part of a select company chosen to serve a select cause, he acquires certain privileges not accorded outsiders. He is removed from ordinary accountability. He can lie and the lie is morally justified. He can assassinate. Membership in the secrets society becomes so compelling that people who are not evil in themselves begin to do bad things to stay in the inner group. Acceptance of the group's methods is the price of belonging, and that price keeps rising.

The weight of forbidden secrets can warp a man's loyalties. We are told that Dr. Nathan Gordon, a former "middle-level CIA employee," decided "on his own" to preserve a deadly medicine cabinetful of shellfish toxin, cobra venom and heaven knows what other horrors. Richard Helms, then chief of the CIA, says well, yes, he did give an "oral order" in 1970 to destroy the stuff, as President Nixon had directed. But it appears obvious that the real reason the deadly vials were preserved was that a man in Dr. Gordon's position can come to believe that the highest authority is neither the law of the land nor the President of the United States. It is the Secret Organization itself—and that is very bad news indeed, because it means there is no authority at all.

Presidential aide John Dean told his boss Richard Nixon there was a cancer growing on the Presidency. Recent CIA revelations suggest that for years a cancer has been growing on this whole country. The intelligence community was a secret, dark garden, and what appears to have been growing there under cover of such rubrics as "national security" was nothing less than the roots and tentacles of a genuine police state. Of course we need to keep some secrets. Of course we need to maintain an intelligence capability—though far less, I suspect, than the present intelligence community and the White House would have us believe.

Once you set up something so secret that nobody else can look at it, nobody else can oversee it. You no longer have to ask yourself: How dirty a trick is

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"too dirty"? You can use any damned trick you want. One is free to lie. One is also free to cheat, embezzle or steal without fear of ordinary criminal prosecution. This is the very antithesis of our system of checks and balances. What were the punishments for murders, attempted murders, botched murder plots? No way to tell.

Another thing about secrets: They don't seem to last as long as they used to. They ooze; they leak; they degenerate and decay into history almost before our eyes. The official secrets closet today, I suspect, is a threadbare place full of obsolete codes, moldy disguises, broken ciphers, bulging files on plots long dead. It was in recognition of this modern truth that Congress recently amended the Freedom of Information Act, over President Ford's veto. This amendment provides the public with a tool to pry no-longer-critical information out of the Government.

What is to be done? It is all so massive and so sinister, one is tempted to make the radical suggestion to abolish the CIA altogether. Or at the very least, cut the monster into two pieces-surveillance and operations-and put each one under separate Government control. Or if the CIA has grown too fat in its 30-year history, too Hydra-headed to be cut in two, or if the dirty tricks have been too dirty too long to clean up now, perhaps we should let the dear old monster go the way of the brontosaurus. Consider it obsolete and start over. Only time and vigorous continuing Congressional investigations will tell. I hope they tell plenty.

I think we need to hear a lot more about the value and durability of secrets in the post-Vietnam, pan-nuclear age. We also need to give some thought to the distinction between *data* and *intelligence*. The Warren Commission Report, in hindsight, appears to be mostly data, and incomplete data at that. But what is the nature of "intelligence" in a world where, as someone in Washington recently testified, "the lead time on World War Three is fifteen minutes"?

I don't know the answers-only that we all must begin to ask ourselves these questions. We all must pick up the toads and handle them. Self-government in the dark is not possible. The central secret of democracy may be that there can be no enduring secrets, that the people must know, that to opt for the democratic form of government is to forfeit forever one of life's sweetest comforts: the right not to know. THE END

Shana Alexander has been a staff writer for Life magazine and a regular columnist for Newsweek. She is a TV commentator expressing her opinions on the "Point-Counterpoint" segment of the CBS-TV program "60 Minutes." Her first book was "The Feminine Eye" (1970), a collection of her observations and reflections on the United States. A second book, "Shana Alexander's State-by-State Guide to Women's Legal Rights," was published in 1975. She is now at work on a book about Patricia Hearst and social change in America. It will be published by Viking Press.