

Polygraph perfidy: the silencing of eyewitness Sandy Serrano

by Jonn G. Christian

A Special Unit Senator tape recording of Sandy Serrano being polygraphed reveals that the key witness to the "girl in the polka dot dress" was browbeaten into recanting her story by polygrapher Lt. Enrique 'Hank' Hernandez on June 20, 1986. The audio tape was only released to the public last April by State Archivist John Burns.

After wining and dining Serrano and her aunt at a nearby restaurant until about 11 p.m., Hernandez escorted them back to SUS headquarters.

The tape reveals that Hernandez then proceeded to regale them with braggadocio about his polygraph expertise being in such demand that he had been sent on "assignments" all over the globe. "I have been called to South America, to Vietnam, to Europe . . . The last (polygraph) test that I administered was to the dictator in Caracas, Venezuela . . . He was a big man, a dictator . . . Perez-Jimenez was (his) last name and this is when there was a transition in the government of Venezuela . . . that's when President Bettencourt came. There was a great thing involved over there and I tested this gentleman . . ." Hernandez told Serrano and her aunt. Without coming right out and saying it, Hernandez was actually referring to his long-term and ongoing CIA assignments, a sub rose and hardly unrelated "connection" he shared with immediate superior, Lt. Manuel Pena.)

Then, without warning, Hernandez announced he was hooking Serrano up to a ready-to-roll polygraph.

The tape records her in-vain protests.

Bear in mind Hernandez was completely aware of "The Bernsteins" and the dual corroborations of "the girl in the polkadot dress" before this session.

Hernandez: "If I ask you ques-



LAPD-SUS polygrapher Lt. Enrique Hernandez also had close CIA connections, according to the FBI. Photo: LAPD-SUS/State Archive



LAPD-SUS supervisor Lt. Manuel S. Pena was closely connected to the CIA, according to the FBI. Photo: SUS-LAPD records/State Archives.

tions about the Ambassador Hotel, will you tell me the truth? (Serrano: Yes.) Do you believe that I will be completely fair with you throughout this examination? (No.) Between the ages of 18 and 19, do you remember lying to the police about something very serious? (No!) When you told the police that a girl with a polkadot dress told you she had shot Kennedy, were you telling the truth? (She didn't say they had shot Kennedy . . . She said 'We shot him.' I don't know if she was saying we, I mean her.) Did a girl in a polkadot dress tell you that 'We have shot Kennedy?' (White

dress, black polkadots.) Did a girl in a white dress with black polkadots tell you 'We have shot Kennedy?' (Yes.) During the first 19 years of your life, do you remember lying to an FBI agent? (No.) After Kennedy was shot, did you lie to an FBI agent? (No.) On election night, at the Ambassador Hotel, did you, yourself, see a girl with a white dress with black polkadots? (Yes.) Is there some other question that you're afraid of we'll ask you during these tests? (Like what?) Have you tried to answer all my questions truthfully? (As possible.) You can relax now...."

Hernandez tried to switch directions. "You know the hassle we have to be concerned with? (Yes, you know, let's see, it'll be Jordan, I guess. No?) You know who? (No.) The family of Senator Kennedy. (Oh, well...) They are the people that... the hassle is with. They'll never know, until people come forward and are truthful with this thing, until the balance of people come forward and truthful they will be able to rest. (Yes.) Because they don't know, and they want to find out what happened to their father, those kids did. Ethel wants to have, to find out what happened to her husband. This isn't, this isn't a silly thing. (Oh, I know it's not a silly thing, but don't be, don't come with this intimate business, let's just get this job done.) Don't you have any sentiment for them? (Yes, I do, I have sentiment for them, but I just don't think right now it should be looked upon.)

"Oh, okay.... Is everything you have told me about the girl in the polkadot dress true? (Yes.) After Kennedy was shot, did you see a girl with a white dress and black polkadots on that stairway? (Yes.) Are you lying when you say

you saw a girl in a white and black polkadot dress? (No.)

"Have you ever been engaged? (No.) Did anybody ever tell you 'We have shot Kennedy?' (Yes.) On the night of the election, did you ever sit on that stairway? (Yes.) Did you make up this story about seeing the girl in the polkadot dress? (No)."

Hernandez again switched directions: "Have you ever seen a marijuana cigarette? (No.) Have you ever smoked a marijuana cigarette? (No.) Are you afraid that I can tell if you are lying to me? (guttural...) After Kennedy was shot, did anyone tell you 'We have shot Kennedy'? (Yes.) Have you lied to my questions about the Kennedy shooting? (No....)"

After an interminable silence, Hernandez hits barrel bottom. "Sandy, I'm not going to ask you any more questions, not a single one. I do my job to you like a brother. Look, I presume, I don't know what religion you are. I'm Catholic. Are you Catholic? (Yes and no.) Yes and no? (I don't know; I don't believe in religion.)"

One hears Hernandez seething in the background, after which he coos: "Okay. Here's the thing. You're an intelligent young girl. You know, that for some reason, this was made up. Now, let me tell you this. I've talked to, I've talked to 19 girls. (Uh-huh.) Out of the 19 girls that I've talked to that really loved Kennedy, as a person, some of the girls made up stories because they wanted publicity. Some of the girls made up stories because they thought they could get something of value, money, ah, or something. There's only two out of the 19 girls that I've talked to, that I really sincerely believe didn't do it for publicity, not for monetary value, not for their own personal gain,

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but because they were sorry about what happened and they loved President Kennedy, or Senator Kennedy. So, what, here's what you have to think about right now is that I think you owe it to Senator Kennedy, the late Senator Kennedy, to come forth, be a woman about this, if he, and you don't know, and I don't know whether he's a witness right now in this room watching what we're doing in here.

"Don't shame his death by keeping this thing up. I have compassion for you. I want to know why, I want to know why you did what you did. This is a very serious thing.

(Exasperated: I seen those people.) "No. No. No. No, Sandy. I know what I told you about that. You can't say you saw something when you didn't see it. Sandy, look, I can, I can explain this to the investigators where you don't even have to talk to them, and they won't talk to you. I can sit down with you, and your aunt, in the next room and I can guarantee you that nobody will ask you one more question, about this.

"But I know that as you get older, one of these days you're gonna be a mother. You're gonna be a mother. You're gonna have kids, and you know that you can't live a life of shame knowing what you're doing right now is wrong. (Well, I'm still not doing

anything wrong.) Well, maybe you don't feel that, but when you get older you will.

"And you see here, you see here, Sandy, not to get sentimental, not to get sentimental, but I personally loved Kennedy as a man, you see. I knew the man, I had lunch with him, he gave me a commendation that I, that I relish very much, it's . . . one of my most prized mementos now . . . one my more prized mementos . . . And I think you're probably as sorry as I am for what happened. (Yes.) We have enough of a problem (Uh-huh . . .) nationally to determine what actually happened. Probably somebody else saw something. I don't know, but what you're talking about, what you said you saw is not true.

"And I can guarantee you this, Sandy, and believe me, and I'm talking to you with complete honesty (Yeah, okay . . .) that after we leave this room if you want to tell me why is it you made up this story nobody else will talk to you, about anything. I can assure you this . . . But, please, in the name of Kennedy. (Don't use the name of Kennedy in any of this business.) Sandy, you know, you know this is wrong, you may want to be pushing it off with a smirk on your face, with a smile (No!) but you know that deep inside of you (I remember seeing the girl!) No, no, I'll tell you what you have told here about saying a person tell you 'We have shot Kennedy,' and that's nonsense!

(That's what she said.)

"No it isn't, Sandy. Please, don't rant about. (Say). Look it, look it, I loved this man— (Same as I!) and you came in here, ah, he, if right now, he can't even (Don't shout at me!) Well, I'm trying not to shout but this is a very emotional thing with me too, you see. (Uh-huh.) . . . If you loved the man, the least you owe him . . . the least you owe him is the courtesy of letting him rest in peace, and he can't rest. I don't think I could rest knowing . . . (Well, he's go—) Pardon me (Never mind . . . never mind.) You say he's gone. (I'm, well, you know, this thing of rest in peace, then when you get into religion, that's a different thing to me.) Well, regardless, you have, we have to go somewhere. (No.) We have to go somewhere. (No, we don't . . .) We have to go somewhere. (I don't agree with you, but go ahead anyway.)

"But we have to, something happens. We don't know. We don't really think that he could watch us right now? (No.) You don't believe it, well, we, we'll never know; that's something I— (Yeah, yeah, yeah, but I don't believe it . . .) This is a very serious thing. (Yes, I know.) And I don't want to go out here and tell these people. I would just rather you tell me and I'll keep it right here and say and I'll cancel the report. I can do this. I have the authority to cancel the report, about you.

"But the only way I can do it is by you telling me the truth . . .

(But only let me, I can tell it!) Yes, there's a truth to tell, Sandy.... There's a truth to tell... (That's it!) Now you see what happens, there's, there's two ways to approach this thing (Right.) The first one is for me to appeal to you as a decent ... woman ... (Right, right, right..)

And right now I have my deepest compassion for you because you're a young lady... (Uh-huh)..and I want to try to do whatever I believe is best for you, that's the best for you... (Well, I'm...) I think probably somebody misquoted you from the beginning... is what I li—, I don't know. Somebody escorted you, one thing led to another, before you know it, maybe it wasn't even your fault that somebody put, started putting this in the television, everything... but if that is the case, well tell me about it.

"It's very easy to redeem, but it isn't easy to redeem, something that's a deep wound, that will grow with you like a disease, like cancer. (Uh-huh...) So tell me, how did it, somebody misquoted you, and the first thing you know you were involved in something you didn't want you to be involved in. (Um, yes and no.)

"Well, how was it, that somebody called you from the papers or the television had you there on the TV and the next thing, you know you're supposed to know something that you didn't really see...?"

The now-frightened and increasingly confused sounding

Serrano still refused to cave in. Hernandez added girth to his "stick" by hinting she'd be trashed by "the news media" if and/or when SUS was "forced" to label her "a liar," publicly, which he intimated was imminent.

It doesn't figure that anyone in Serrano's lonely and isolated "situation" would have done other than concede and run for cover, which she did. It wasn't until April 1988 that she spoke out publicly about what she had, in fact, seen and heard on the night of RFK's assassination, and of the ensuing "treatment" she had suffered at the hands of SUSers Pena and Hernandez.

It took considerable courage (and encouragement by author Christian) for Serrano to set the record straight. In April 1988, the news media wrongly repeated the falsified SUSers' "findings," that said Serrano "had admitted lying" about "the girl in the polka-dot dress."

On April 20 of this year, for the first time since her interview on NBC 20 years ago, Serrano spoke to a member of the news media about her experience regarding Robert Kennedy's assassination.

During an interview with Jack Thomas of National Public Radio (and Associated Press), Serrano stated, "There was a lot of badgering going on. I was just 20 years old, and I came unglued. I said what they wanted me to say. I don't want to go through that again."