



Critically acclaimed book about Robert Kennedy's assassination published by Random House in 1978, secretly recalled in 1979 and destroyed by the publisher in 1985.

Publishing perfidy: Book burners of Random House

by Jonn G. Christian

By 1975, Bill Turner, a former FBI agent, and I had managed to assemble enough documentation to accept a publishing offer from Random House. When the book was published three years later Dr. Robert J. Joling, president of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, described it "... thoroughly researched and meticulously documented—a formid-

able grand jury portfolio in book form (and) the Helter Skelter-Godfather of assassination books."

Our book's title truly reflected its content: "The Assassination of Robert F. Kennedy: A Searching Look at the Conspiracy and Cover-up 1968-1978."

Manson Family prosecutor Vincent T. Bugliosi wrote, "The evidence presented in this book is more than enough to compel an official, in-depth reinvestigation into the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy."

Our book remains the definitive work on this case. It's listed as principal bibliography material in the California State Ar-

chives. Also, we've been informed that its content helped to persuade the State Archivist John Burns to resist "redacting" (censoring) the LAPD investigation material that he released last April.

Previews of our book were positive to excellent, as were the advance orders. Over 19,000 of the 20,000 first-run copies were advance-ordered and shipped to distributors and bookstores all across the American continent.

What Random House did to the book is to our knowledge, without precedence in American journalism. Without advising the authors, Random House recalled approximately 12,000 copies of the book, and hid them in their Maryland warehouse. Persons who attempted to order copies of the book, we later learned, were told they were "unavailable."

When we made inquiries about the poor sales we were not told what Random House had done. Instead, we were told that the book "just isn't selling."

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Book burners

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When we tried to break free of our contract with Random House in order to approach other publishers, insurmountable obstacles were placed in our way.

The architects of this publishing perfidy were Random

House's chairman Robert L. Bernstein, editor Jason Epstein and the publisher's general counsel Gerald Hollingsworth.

Getting a book re-published in any form, let alone one with an artificially dismal "sales record," was doubly impossible (at that time). Thus, 12,000 books remained vaulted; that is, until Random House's executives had them hauled away, and destroyed, on November 19, 1985.

We were not advised of this, much less offered the opportunity to buy the books back.

In October of this year Random House editor Robert Loomis told Betsy Langman-Schulberg, (wife of writer Budd Schulberg, who was within a few feet of Kennedy when the candidate was shot Kennedy); that the book had

been "routinely destroyed."

Why did Random House "spike" our book? Because of the threat of a civil lawsuit, by a notorious "character" whose name appeared in the book and on police blotters all across America for suspicion in crimes galore, including involvement in the JFK assassination.

In the summer of 1977, during final writing stages on the manuscript, Random House Editor Epstein flew to Los Angeles to meet with the authors and Vince Bugliosi, to discuss tactics and strategy if and when any lawsuits were filed.

Epstein literally begged Bugliosi to act as Random House's chief counsel, which Bugliosi agreed to do without reservation. Epstein also asked Bugliosi to check and double-check the facts in our book, which Bugliosi did for a token \$1 fee.

When the aforementioned threat of a law suit was made Epstein consulted neither Bugliosi nor us.

Bugliosi called general counsel Hollingsworth to ask what had happened, only to be told that the book had been recalled for reasons having to do with it alleged-

ly having been "inadequately researched."

LA Weekly writer Andy Boehm telephoned phoned Loomis and told him what Ms. Langman-Schulberg had said. The Random House editor responded, "A publisher has the right to protect itself." He added that the authors "had an obligation in their contract to guarantee" to the publisher that all of the facts were correct.

True enough. But, Random House retained Bugliosi for just such purposes and nobody ever challenged his competency. Conversely, the same contract said that Random House would not (and could not) hinder or hamper distribution of our book, in any manner or fashion, including any out-of-court settlements (such as we're convinced happened) without our expressed written consent, let alone without even notifying us.

Our book currently commands upwards of \$100 a copy from most major book-finding services. Translated into dollars this adds up to \$156,000 that Random House threw away when the book sold for \$12.95, or \$1.2 million at the going rate.