

The Ballad of Mae Brussell

Mae Brussell was my favorite conspiracy researcher.

There she would be: plump, energetic, no makeup, wearing a long peasant dress patchworked with philosophical maxims, breathlessly slurring her words with information overload—but her eyes would always reveal the deep sense of compassion permeating every fact she would share so eagerly. How did it happen that this white, upper-middle-class, twice-divorced mother, busily content with tennis lessons and orthodontia, had become an expert on political assassinations, cheerfully knitting the sleeve of a sweater while describing the architecture of a police state in progress?

Her late father, Edgar Magnin, was the head rabbi of Los Angeles. As a child raised in Beverly Hills affluence, Mae was unhurt by the Depression, but expressed sympathy for the underprivileged to the point that her family would see a hobo on the highway and tease her: "Oh, look, there's one of Mae's friends." One of her actual friends was the daughter of cowboy movie-star Tom Mix. House guests ranged from movie moguls to philosophers and scientists, from Louis B. Mayer to Thomas Mann, from Jack Warner to Albert Einstein.

"I grew up," she once recalled, "thinking this was the way life is."

Then, in her early teens, the family took a trip around the world, and her awareness of suffering expanded in the process. In Bombay, she saw people sleeping in the streets. They had no homes or possessions. In Shanghai, her boat hit a sampan and split it in half. Other boats came out to get the clothes off the victims' bodies. Some lived and died on their sampans, never getting to shore. She wasn't used to seeing such overwhelming poverty. In Egypt, there were children with flies sticking to the snot on their faces. In Tel Aviv, the hotel her family stayed at was bombed. They were the last Americans out of Spain in 1936, leaving a civil war behind.



DAMAGE CONTROL

by Paul Krassner

"We were happy little tourists," she mused. "But it always bothered me. I never felt the same again. I was haunted by the imbalance. I wanted to help people, but I didn't know what form it would take." A few years after that trip, she went to Stanford University, majoring in philosophy. "I think the discipline of it helped me with my research later."

Henry Miller later became a significant influence on her life: "Henry freed me from a lot of the hang-ups that I was brought up with. He opened up the whole field of sex as being as normal as the air you breathe. He brought out that sex and wine and a good meal and companionship and a good book or whatever, are part of a day's experience. It's not something you do on Saturday night and have the maid turn down the beds, like my relatives used to do. The husband had one room, the wife another.

There was no discussion of sex, no openness. It was never thought of as fun."

In 1963, her seven-year-old daughter, Bonnie, saw Lee Harvey Oswald on television and felt sorry for him. She decided to send him her teddy bear. It was all wrapped up and ready to mail when she saw Jack Ruby kill Oswald, live on TV that Sunday morning, and then over and over again in spastic slow motion.

"My concern over who killed John Kennedy was basically selfish," Mae said, "to find out if there had been a coup—was the United States going fascist? Would I be like Anne Frank's

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father, who told his family that things were okay and that people were basically good—while they were living their last days—instead of saying when it was coming down that some people are worse than others? And they never fought Nazism but just watched it all go by, and hid in the attic until their time came around to be taken away. With a family of five children, my husband and myself, we had an obligation to understand the world outside the home, in which they would someday live and become part of the larger community, part of the entire world political scene."

One bit of research just led to another—and another and another and another. The ultimate mystery would remain forever inconceivable—but to Mae, assassination research became a spiritual quest for truth. Conspiracy was the Zen grid of her perception, drawing her into a separate reality that Carlos Castaneda never even dreamed of.

"When Hitler failed, his officers were brought to the US. It is in this context that the Kennedys, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, labor leaders, judges, entertainers, reporters, authors, students, Black Panthers, Indians, Chicanos and hippies are being slain,

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and why the masses are being drugged, doped for control. So that my interest in the Kennedy assassination became more involved with the Nazi links than in the anti-Castro Cuban links. My difference with the researchers at large is that they want to stop with the Bay of Pigs operation, and I think it's bigger."

Indeed, in 1972, when the details began to come out about a break-in at Democratic Party headquarters in the Watergate Hotel, Mae immediately recognized personnel and *modus operandi* from nine years of assassination research, while the mainstream press continued to refer to Watergate as a "caper" and "a third-rate burglary." And so it came to pass that while Rabbi Magnin was entertaining Richard Nixon at his home in Los Angeles, his daughter Mae was revealing the

President's role in an incredible conspiracy. Meanwhile, she also perceived an assassination plot, not merely against specific individuals, but against the entire counterculture that was burgeoning at the time.

"I realized that in this country we had a revolution—of housing, food, hair style, clothing, cosmetics, transportation, value systems, religion—it was an economic revolution, affecting the cosmetics industry, canned foods, the use of land; people were delivering their own babies, recycling old clothes, withdrawing from spectator sports. They were breaking the barriers where white and black could rap in 1967. This was the year of the Beatles, the summer of *Sergeant Pepper*, the Monterey Pop Festival, Haight-Ashbury, make your own candle and turn off the electricity, turn on with your friends and laugh—that's what life was all about."

Mae Brussell died of cancer a few

years ago at the age of 66. Somehow it seemed appropriate that mourners at her funeral were discussing the possibility of a conspiracy behind *her* death. After all, hadn't she been in the middle of investigating satanic cults in the military? If Mae were alive, she'd be glad to show you her file on CIA experimentation with cancer. You want names of such victims? She would get out a list. "Jack Ruby... Martha Mitchell... William Casey...." She would give you a copy of a study by Texas researcher Penn Jones showing that, of more than 100 unusual deaths of witnesses in the assassination of John F. Kennedy, 27 key witnesses died of cancer within six weeks after the death of the President.

Mae died seven weeks before the 25th anniversary of the Kennedy assassination, when she would likely have received a token of the honor and recognition she so richly deserved. ●