

Judy and Jack and Sam and Frank

MY STORY. By Judith Exner.
As told to Ovid Demaris. Grove.
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By WILLIAM B. FURLONG

JUDITH CAMPBELL EXNER is 42 now and her record of her years has the wispy, downtrodden tone of a disgruntled gnat. She buzzed her way into a particular kind of society about 17 years ago and eventually she achieved a somewhat exotic status: she went to bed with the "King," the President, and the Godfather—Frank Sinatra, John F. Kennedy, and Sam Giancana. Given the nature of the liaisons, her story should be the liveliest tale since Madame de Pompadour's. But Mrs. Exner approaches the opportunity with a ruthless ineptitude. Anyone looking in this book for the vigor

nounced ambitions: in room 724 of the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles on July 11, 1960—the Monday that the convention that nominated him for President opened—he allegedly set up a three-in-a-bed deal (and himself with a bad back!) in which he and two girls would partake of their various appetites and pleasures. (Judy refused be-

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and insight that graced the activities of La Pompadour—who used her position, horizontal and otherwise, to protect Voltaire, save Diderot's *Encyclopédie*, act in Moliere's comedies, and lead the *philosophes* to claim her as one of their own—is likely to be disappointed. For the only reaction to this book involves an historical perspective: the paramour business sure has gone all to hell lately.

What Judith Campbell Exner tells in this book is one thing and what she reveals is another.

What she tells is the precise time and place of her many claimed assignations with John Kennedy (i.e., the first time was March 7, 1960, in room 1651 of the Plaza Hotel in New York city). And that Jack had very pro-

cause, my god, a girl has to have standards!) And that Teddy propositioned her even before Jack had a chance to do so. ("That little rascal!" she quotes Jack as saying.) And all kinds of little goodies that would keep gossip columnists positively titillated if only they could keep it all straight.

But what Judith Campbell Exner reveals is nothing.

There is no insight as to whether Jack Kennedy was manipulated by Sam Giancana—then the richest and most powerful boss in the underworld—through their bedmate-in-common. Or whether she was the contact-person between the President and the Godfather in the United States' attempts to kill Fidel Castro of Cuba. Indeed, there is no awareness that these questions might even come up.

Similarly there is no insight as to what Jack Kennedy was doing or thinking—other than of sex—in these, some of the most critical months of his

life. Take March 7, 1960, the eve of the New Hampshire primary. Jack leaves New Hampshire and, she says, flies to New York to go to bed with her. Not once can she remember that he mentioned anything about New Hampshire. Or August 8, 1961, the eve of the Berlin crisis. Khrushchev is about to build the Berlin wall. Kennedy is about to send 1,500 American troops down the autobahn and—if the Soviets interpret this as hostile—he is ready to call up the reserves and the National Guard. But all Judy and Jack talk about when they get together in the family quarters of the White House is whether she told anybody about his three-in-a-bed plan. ("Stories have gotten back to me . . .") I don't ask much of tattling little tales about the Leader of the Western World, but I do expect that your average everyday run-of-the-mill bedmate might have noticed whether the world was on the brink of incineration and whether the President happened to mention it, even in an offhand sort of way. I mean, you can't go through all this and not notice something.

It is not surprising that accompanying all this intellectual ferment is some

(Continued on page E6)

(Continued from page E1)

of the most banal prose and dreadful dialogue in contemporary literature. What is surprising is a most improbable feat of portraiture: Jack Kennedy emerges as a bore.

Not only did he have nothing important to say to her—at least nothing that she can remember—but Mrs. Exner, who must rank as something of an expert in these matters, found him disappointing in his love-making calisthenics. "His attitude was that he was there to be serviced. Partly this was due to his back problem and partly I think he had been spoiled by women"—most of whom seem to have refrained from writing about it.

How much of all of this can one believe?

It must be observed that Mrs. Exner has a very particular memory. She seems to remember the details of her many assignations with JFK—and, in fact, with many, many other men—but she can't remember the date of her first wedding. ("It was either late October or late November, 1952.") But she supports her claims of association with Jack Kennedy with personal observations of the family quarters of the White House ("Most of the furniture

was from their Georgetown home") and with a certain kind of documentation—(she provides 13 telephone numbers—some of which presumably were secret—through which Jack Kennedy or his secretary, Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln, could be reached during his campaign and his Presidency). She anticipates—and retaliates for—the inevitable denials of the Kennedy clan by placing Kenny O'Donnell and Dave Powers specifically at the scene of several assignments and by claiming that Mrs. Lincoln had a specific role in setting some of them up. And in case they now want to issue denials without documentation, she throws in—not quite as an afterthought—a note that she "has a suitcase full of records and diaries covering those years."

Still, the *feel* of JFK—as he was known to both his public and his personal following—is not quite right. It is more than a matter of a philandering instinct tarnishing Camelot. It is a matter of having to look at John F. Kennedy—if all this is substantially true—from an entirely different angle of vision and not liking the questions or the answers.

Is it possible that JFK's values placed sex above the Presidency? And that he was thus emboldened to risk his Presidency with so wanton a liaison? Or was he burdened with an arrogance of power which led him to believe that he would never be caught or that—if he was—it wouldn't really matter? Did he have so many different sides to his personality that he could baldly deny to his closest of friends that there was "another woman" in his life at the very moment he was preparing—according to the timetable of Mrs. Exner—to give "another woman" a diamond-and-ruby brooch worth a

small fortune? Was his marriage a charade? Were the celebrations of that marriage, and his image as a "devoted" family man, based on a total and unremitting deceit? Was the appeal he so boyishly offered his most fervent supporters—i.e., Catholic women—a similar deceit? (To be sure, cynics say that individually they all wanted to bed down with him. Perhaps some would, some wouldn't. But cynics aside, as a group Catholic women cherished the notion that JFK was the embodiment of fidelity in married men.) And if he would so readily betray his most devoted followers, what would he do to the rest of us?

The ultimate irony in this book is that—despite the passionate assertions of Judy's fealty to him—JFK doesn't come off quite as well as the gangster-overlord, Sam Giancana. At the time Judy knew him intimately—which was

about the same time she knew Jack intimately—Sam was running a \$2-billion-a-year business and his annual take from it may have exceeded the combined personal incomes of Howard Hughes and J. Paul Getty. But this was one detail that somehow escaped Judy. For her, he was just sweet little ol' Sam Flood from Chicago and the only thing unusual about him was that he "owned more of it [jewelry] than anybody I have ever known." It never occurred to her to wonder why.

But the restraint and patience of the Sam Giancana pictured here—it was 18 months before he got her into bed with him and the whole book is a testimony that it shouldn't have been that hard—doesn't match the Sam Giancana his family and friends knew. His oldest daughter, Toni, told me of a lurid incident when Sam came at her with a razor strop—and she ran to the kitchen to get a kitchen knife—and they maneuvered around like two kids in a rumble. And all because, as an adult, she disobeyed him and came home after midnight on one date.

Moreover, he is endowed in the book with a noncredible political power—the power to swing Illinois and hence the 1960 Presidential election to JFK. Sam's political power was, in fact, limited and somewhat parochial. Consider what happened when Sam tried to get his nephew-in-law seated in the city council. He did get the nephew on the ballot and then saw him withdraw shortly before the election—thanks to the Chicago newspapers and the candidate's galloping case of transcendent stupidity, only to be replaced by a choice who lasted 19 days. Then consider whether it is not more difficult to get your mistress' lover elected President of the United States than to get your nephew-in-law elected an alderman in Chicago.

Suggesting that Sam Giancana was "the influence" behind JFK's election further plays with fact without reality. The fact is that a difference of 4,430 votes would have switched Illinois from Kennedy to Nixon. The suspicion is that the Democrats stole that many votes or more (though nobody has proven—or much suggested—before

this—that Sam Giancana stole them). The reality is that there are two parties in Illinois and that the Republicans were believed to be at least as enterprising as the Democrats in stealing votes; certainly they backed away from any vote-stealing and recount investigation in 1960 when it became apparent that Republican areas in downstate Illinois, as well as Democratic wards in Chicago, would be included in the investigation. The fact is that even if the decision in Illinois could legitimately have been reversed—in that most unlikely of probabilities, an honest count—then Nixon still wouldn't have won the election. Even with Illinois, he would have fallen 20 votes short of a majority in the Electoral College. Thus any insinuation that Sam Giancana "made" Jack Kennedy President—because they had Judy in common—is an unconvincing and deceiving ploy.

As in the Kennedy material, there is considerable evidence that Mrs. Exner was where she claims that she was—and, considering what she exhibits of herself, why else was she there except for the purposes she claims? But there are certain errors of detail in the treatment of Sam Giancana. His home in a suburb of Chicago was of yellow brick,

not—as Mrs. Exner says—red brick. The decor inside was French, not Italian. He did not have a sitting room in his bedroom—says his daughter Toni—but he did have something which Mrs. Exner does not cite; a barber chair in the basement. (He had a barber come in every Sunday morning to give him a shave and a haircut. Considering what happened to another gang leader, Albert Anastasia, in a barber shop some 20 years ago, it may have been a prudent man's investment.) Beyond this, Toni Giancana insists that she knew all the jewelry that Sam gave her mother and none of it looked like the pieces described in the book as having been owned by her mother and given by Sam to Mrs. Exner. "But of course he could have misled her [Mrs. Exner] on this," she adds.

In the end, the significance of this book is going to be in its sales, not its substance. Not until it develops a very large sale—and notoriety or acceptance—and thus threatens the Camelot image, is the Kennedy clan likely to deign to notice it. Otherwise, those who knew and loved JFK best are likely to hope that it will all go quietly away. That would not be a bad fate—unless a new and better paramour comes along. □