

# The Poised Pen of Jackie Onassis

## A Lifelong Writer, She Had Her Way With Words

By Donnie Radcliffe  
Washington Post Staff Writer 5/28/94

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis put words to paper all her life, but future generations aren't likely to read them as her memoir. She was a prolific writer of letters, notes, poems and memos, and for special family occasions she even created little "books" in lieu of gifts. But she guarded her innermost thoughts as carefully as she protected her children.

"Other First Ladies openly had diaries, but I was never aware that Jackie did," said Nancy Tuckerman, the former First Lady's childhood friend, spokeswoman and confidante. "I don't think she ev-

er planned to write a memoir."

Onassis, an editor at Doubleday when she died of cancer last week at age 64, said as much to author David Wise, who worked with her on his 1987 novel "The Samarkand Dimension."

In a conversation they had over lunch in New York two years ago he reminded her that he once had asked her if she would ever write her own

See WRITINGS, C5, Col. 1



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One of Jacqueline Bouvier's whimsical drawings about her European travels in 1951, later published by Delacorte Press in "One Special Summer."

# Jackie's Rare Writings

WRITINGS, From C1

book. "Maybe when I'm 90," she had originally replied, which he took to mean "never."

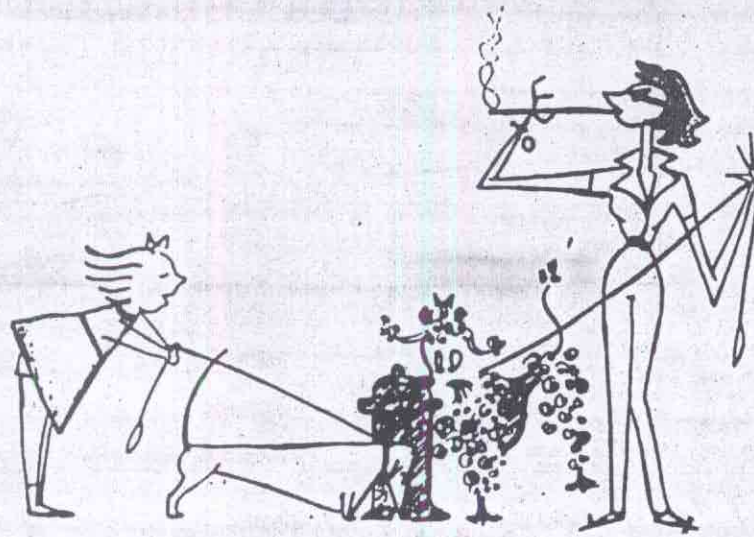
But this time she was more expansive in her response. "People change," Wise writes in *Newsweek*. "The person she might have written about 30 years ago 'is not the same person today. The imagination takes over.'" Citing as an example Isak Dinesen's memoir, "Out of Africa," Onassis said Dinesen "left out how badly her husband had treated her. She created a new past, in effect. And why sit indoors with a yellow pad writing a memoir when you could be outdoors?"

Jacqueline Onassis counseled her children to be equally cautious in how they spent their words. When Caroline Kennedy Schlossberg reminisced about her father on the 75th anniversary of his birth, on her mother's advice she left out references to bedtime stories JFK used to tell her. As columnist Jonathan Alter recounts it, "Jackie believed that when you tell something deeply personal to people you don't know, it ceases to be yours."

Determined to keep her spoken words out of the public domain until well after her and her children's deaths, Onassis donated a series of four taped interviews with author William Manchester to the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum in Boston with the proviso that they not be made public until the year 2067. Made in 1964 and '65, when Manchester was writing "The Death of a President," the tapes total 220 minutes and fill 151 pages.

Also under protection in the library vaults is the so-called "Camelet" interview she taped with Theodore H. White in 1963 in the days immediately following President Kennedy's assassination. William

## Dogs Have Their Day on Coronation Cruise



From her newspaper days, Jacqueline Bouvier's illustration

Johnson, the library archivist, said the terms of White's gift prohibit releasing the tape until a year after Onassis's death.

Johnson also said the library has very little written material by the former First Lady, nor is there any signed correspondence between her and President Kennedy. "To the extent that it exists," he said, "she retained it as personal property." If, indeed, that is the case, her personal letters and diaries almost certainly are part of her estate.

But other letters, which she wrote to family, friends, associates and colleagues, do exist. "I would never publish any I have," said Tuckerman. "I don't think she would want me to."

Still, as Onassis's mystique grows and her signature becomes increasingly valuable, more and more of her correspondence is likely to enter the market.

Her letters have always been sought by collectors. According to Manhattan autograph dealer Charles Hamilton: "All the dealers I know are sold out. People are offering letters to me left and right, but virtually all of those were signed by her secretaries. When you see her Kennedy signature, you know it's hers



because she did a beautiful K, a knockout K." Even rarer, he said, is correspondence she signed as Onassis.

In 1970, it was Hamilton to whom a Wall Street lawyer tried to sell four letters Jacqueline Kennedy wrote between April 18, 1963, and Nov. 13, 1968 to former deputy defense secretary Roswell Gilpatric. Gilpatric said he discovered they were missing only after learning from Maxine Cheshire, then a Washington Post columnist.

Seized under subpoena the same day Gilpatric's wife was filing separation papers, the letters created a sensation and became known as Onassis's "Dear Ros" letters. They thanked Gilpatric for his letter about the baby she was expecting, a toy helicopter he sent to her son John and a "slim little volume" of poems he had sent her.

Responding to his wishes to her for "a happiness that certainly is entitled her" after her marriage to Greek shipping tycoon Aristotle Onassis, Mrs. Onassis wrote: "Dearest Ros, I would have told you before I left—but then everything happened so much more quickly than I'd planned. I saw somewhere what you had said and I was very touched—dear Ros—I hope you know all you were and are and will ever be to me—With my love, Jackie."

Through a spokesman, Onassis denied that she had contributed to the breakup of the Gilpatrics' marriage. "They are very close friends," the spokesman said. "He was at the Onassis' first anniversary party. . . . He was a very good friend of President Kennedy too." Responded Gilpatric's wife, the former Madelin Thayer, to a reporter for the Chicago Daily News: "I have my own feelings about that, but I won't go into them. Just say it was a particularly warm, close, long-lasting relationship."

Hamilton dealt in other letters written by Onassis, among them several to actor Basil Rathbone as he prepared to do a Shakespeare reading at a White House State Dinner for a visiting grand duchess. Biographers might see in the former First Lady's correspondence with Rathbone the makings of a future editor. She thought the Richard II's farewell speech was "ideal," she wrote the actor, but "I just hope it has no lines about kings being despots that will make the poor grand duchess think everyone wants to push her off her throne! If there is some insidious line, you could leave it."

Jacqueline Onassis's career in publishing officially dates to 1975, the year of Onassis's death, when another childhood friend, Letitia Baldrige, who had been her White House social secretary, suggested she give editing a try because she always had enjoyed writing and being with writers. But in 1951, she and her sister, Lee Bouvier Radziwill, had collaborated on a family "book" when they spent a summer touring Europe on the largess of their stepfather and mother.

They weren't the Bronte sisters, Radziwill wrote in the foreword to "One Special Summer," which Delacorte Press published commercially in 1974. But they often "put pen to paper, particularly when we gave presents to our mother . . . since she far preferred something we had written or drawn to anything we might buy for her."

Describing their division of labor, Radziwill said she wrote about "most of their adventures" and sister Jackie did the drawings, the poetry and the sections on Rome and Spain. The work never made the bestseller list, but it wound up on the bookshelves of many a Jackie fan. In it, her spare, whimsical drawings and her tongue-in-cheek observations portray a privileged, if faltering, nobility in a Europe she would return to conquer just 10 years later as the 31-year-old wife of America's 35th president.

The book's centerpiece, however, is young Jackie Bouvier's epic poem about two American girls on a fling that only a sister-turned-her-Boswell might someday interpret. It begins:

*"Oh, we're not at all what you think we are*

*"We've traveller's checks and a little car—*

*"And passports we know we never must lose*

*"We wear white gloves and we shine our shoes*

*"But in Venice we looked for a falling star . . .*

*"Danced a quadrille with the Jack of Spades*

*"Waltzed down the shadows of long arcades*

*"I had a lover named Olio'  
Delmonico*

*"And he stole a kiss by the Ca'  
Rezzonico*

*"When dawn touched the top of Salutes' dome*

*"We whispered false names and we stole back home*

*"Oh, we're not at all what we seem to be . . ."*