

Newsday 6/12/96

LIZ SMITH



All the JFK Tales

'ABRUPTLY THE poker of memory stirs the ashes of recollection and uncovers a forgotten ember, still smoldering down there, still hot, still glowing, still red as red," writes the historian William Manchester, who delivered one of the very first books about the Kennedy saga and the death of the president.

YOU CAN hunker down and try to ignore them, but you won't be able to escape the spate of Kennedy books coming out in the months ahead. More material constantly surfaces, people who have told laundered versions of what they know are thinking better of it and spilling *all* the beans. Intimates grow bolder. The death of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was "liberating" to many who feared to talk while she was alive.

They even say that JFK's loyal private secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, finally talked to the dreaded ace reporter Seymour Hersh in the months before her own death. Hersh's book could be finished by this coming winter.

I HAVE also read the manuscript of Ed Klein's "Jack and Jackie," which arrives in the fall. It is amazing. It's like flying through history on greased lightning. (Mr. Klein isn't just a fine reporter; he is an excellent writer.) "Jack and Jackie" is already a Book-of-the-Month selection. It will be excerpted in Vanity Fair come September, then appear as a Ladies Home Journal cover story in October.

AND NOW I learn of another upcoming book, this one by Jackie's own controversial cousin and kinsman, John Davis. It will be published two summers from now, in 1998. Davis has already scored impressively with "The Bouviers," "Mafia Dynasty" and "The Kennedys: Dynasty and Disaster." Literary agent Marianne Strong has sold his new work — tentatively titled "JFK and Mary Pinchot Meyer: A Tale Of



AP File Photo

President Kennedy
A bookstore revival

Two Murdered Lovers" — to respected editor Fred Jordan of Fromm International.

Like so many events and tragedies surrounding the Kennedys, much of this story seems implausible and unbelievable. There is much coincidental high drama, but as usual, lots of questions are left unanswered.

The facts are these. Mary Meyer was the ex-wife of Washington political columnist Cord Meyer. She was the sister-in-law of famous JFK friend Ben Bradlee of Newsweek and the Washington Post. She was best friends of Cicely and James Jesus Angleton, he the head of CIA counter-intelligence.

Mary Meyer and Jack Kennedy had known each other since the days when he was at Harvard and she at Vassar. She came from a rich and powerful Pennsylvania family. Her grandfather had twice been governor of the state. The women Jack Kennedy dallied with did not usually possess such impeccable backgrounds. Jackie was said to be furious about JFK's friendship with Mary; Hollywood sexpots and women of a questionable milieu she could dismiss, but Mary Meyer was something else en-

tirely. Despite Jackie's displeasure, Mary and JFK carried on a 20-month love affair that did not end until his assassination. According to the Davis book, the president and Mary Meyer met at least 40 times in the White House. Some believe she was actually the great love of John F. Kennedy's life.

But only 10 months after the tragedy in Dallas, Mary Meyer herself was brutally murdered on a walking path by the Potomac River. If you think Vince Foster's suicide was handled poorly by the Washington police, wait until you read about the investigation into the murder of Mary Meyer. The crime simply faded away and has never been solved.

Author Davis tries to sort out the mystery, linking it to the Kennedy assassination. He reaches a conclusion as to why Mary Meyer was killed.

I understand that Davis' book has had quite an odyssey on its way to print. The man who wrote the definitive work on Chappaquiddick, Leo Demore, worked for two years on the Meyer murder and gathered 150 pages of research and interviews. Then, in a state of depression, he killed himself.

Subsequently, his papers came to John Davis, who has already advanced many theories about JFK's assassination by the New Orleans Mafia. The combination of Demore research and Davis background was a natural for another riveting Kennedy book.

And what a mini-series this will be! Like Dominick Dunne's "A Season in Purgatory," it's made to order.

NEVER HAVE there been such rave reviews as Rosie O'Donnell received after the Monday debut of her morning talk show. I caught part of the second day — O'Donnell is adorable and the entire premise is so refreshing, funny and easy. You don't feel like you have to take a shower after you watch Rosie and guests do their stuff. Well-wishers have been flooding the studio with flowers. Enormous bouquets arrived from Tom Hanks, Tony Danza, Kate Capshaw, Regis and Kathie Lee, Madonna, and Rosie's role model of showbiz chat — Merv Griffin:

David Letterman sent over a massive quantity of congratulatory pizza — enough to feed the entire "Rosie" staff!