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narrator of “A Walton Thanksgiving”

Nov. 22 marks the 30th anniversary of the death of President John F. Kennedy. Throughout the month, several TV specials will pay homage to his legacy.

Remembering Kennedy

TV specials honor slain president

By Lynn Elber
Associated Press

The light and shadow of John F. Kennedy's life and death are the focus of a variety of television programs marking the 30th anniversary of his assassination.

A miniseries, movie and news specials about the former president, slain in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, are scheduled for November. Here are some projects competing for viewer attention:

“JFK: Reckless Youth,” a four-hour ABC miniseries based on the biography by Nigel Hamilton, will air 9 to 11 p.m. Sunday and Nov. 23.

With Patrick Dempsey starring as Kennedy from age 15 to 29, the miniseries concentrates on his school days, World War II experience and political baptism.

Kennedy's romance with a foreign journalist who was suspected by FBI head J. Edgar Hoover of being a German spy also is detailed. But producer Judith A. Palone said that while the film is sexy, it is not salacious.

The intent, Palone said, was to show the forces of family, personality and events that combined to shape Kennedy's life.

“This miniseries is not a black-and-white depiction, as I think you see in most Kennedy pieces,” she said.

“I think these are full depictions of the Kennedy family — and the



Patrick Dempsey portrays Kennedy in “JFK: Reckless Youth,” a four-hour miniseries Sunday and Nov. 23 on KABC.

Kennedy world. I think we really created the Kennedy world from his childhood right up through politics.”

Those working on the project felt the weight of depicting a U.S. president who still evokes strong feelings for many Americans, Palone said.

“In any biography you have to take some creative license,” she said. “But the words (dialogue) come from text and speeches and the book. Much of this was said by these people.”

“We didn't sit down and write a fairy tale.”

CBS brings fiction and fact to-



Lee Harvey Oswald was shot to death just days after supposedly assassinating Kennedy in Dallas.

gether in “A Walton Thanksgiving,” a new TV movie starring original cast members of the popular 1972-81 series about a family in rural Virginia during the 1930s and '40s.

The movie, airing 9 to 11 p.m. Sunday, is set in 1963 — a time of change for the Waltons and, in the course of a brief, violent moment in Dallas, for the nation.

Author Earl Hamner Jr., who created the TV series and who lent his rich voice to it as narrator, explains why the reunion movie chose to focus on that time and on the president's death.

He said the film's writers, Claire Whitaker and Rod Peterson, felt that 1963 represented a year when the Walton characters would have progressed significantly in their lives.

“And also, as we had so often done in the series, we could show a representative American family weathering a national tragedy,” Hamner said.

He noted “The Waltons” series had included references to such events as the Dust Bowl devastation of U.S. farm land and to the Hindenburg aviation disaster.

“For an obscure little village in the backwoods of Virginia, we did manage to reflect what was going on the world,” Hamner said.

In the movie, the family watches television coverage of Kennedy's death. John Boy Walton (Richard Thomas), now a journalist and TV commentator, is shown covering the story.

The cable channel TNT called on talk-show host Larry King to delve into the impact of the assassination in “Where Were You? Larry King TNT Extra,” a 90-minute special 8 p.m. Sunday.

The program includes interviews taped over a period of more than a year with celebrities and politicians — including Barbra Streisand, Warren Beatty and former President Nixon.

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Whaley challenged by Lee Harvey Oswald role

By Frank Swertlow
Daily News Television Writer

Lee Harvey Oswald may be America's most written-about assassin, but trying to play the killer of President John F. Kennedy in NBC's "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald" was a nightmare for Frank Whaley. Everywhere he turned, there was one conflicting story after another.

"I have played real people before — Robbie Krieger, the Doors' guitar player (in director Oliver Stone's 'The Doors')," said Whaley, whose film airs at 9 tonight on Channel 4. "It was easier to get at the bottom of this man because he was right there. I could turn to him and ask a question."

"With Lee, there are so many different stories and theories. You don't know what kind of guy he was or how he would have behaved. I was in a state of confusion. I just hoped I was getting it right."

Even Oswald's widow, Marina, added to his anxiety. She was little help as a window into the inner world of her husband. Whaley said he found Oswald's widow edgy.

"She is a very nervous woman, strong willed, very stubborn," he recalled. "She said, 'Lee was not so big as you, much smaller bones. I am the same size, but I was 15 pounds lighter.'"

An autobiography, "Marina and Lee: A Love Story," co-written by Marina, was confusing, too, he said.

"She co-wrote it, but now says it



Frank Whaley plays JFK's accused killer, and Helena Bonham Carter his wife, in "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald."

is all lies," he said. "The book is pretty graphic about their sex lives, which was very hearty. It said he was adoring and charming and romantic. But their relationship changed in Dallas. There was a dark side to him. He was very temperamental."

In the film, this dark side surfaces as Oswald is shown slapping his Russian-born wife repeatedly when he became angry. Whaley said the assassin was much worse. "He was very neat and obsess-

ive," he said. "She smoked a lot, still does, and he hated that. He used to put her cigarettes out on her. He could be a real monster."

"Fatal Deception" was the second opportunity Whaley had to play Oswald. He was supposed to play Kennedy's killer in Stone's "JFK" but was bumped when Gary Oldman wanted the role.

Whaley, as a favor to Stone, played an Oswald impostor who was seen in Mexico City. When the NBC movie surfaced, he was

recommended by "those who were involved with 'JFK.'"

But he hesitated. He didn't want to work again in Russia, where a portion of "Fatal Deception" was filmed.

"I shot a film, 'Back in the U.S.S.R.' for Fox, and I dreaded the place," the 25-year-old actor said. "I almost said no. I was being pursued heavily, but I didn't want to return to Russia. It was cold, no food, we had people watching us all the time. I spent three months there the first time and the hotel rooms were bad."

This shoot in Russia would only last two weeks and Whaley relented. "I found the people more open," he said. "They even had a lot of advertisements in English. Commerce was way up. The hotel could have been in San Francisco. We had CNN."

Whaley was not impressed with the Russian film crews. "They were happy to have a job," he said. "But they worked differently. They are not used to our pace. They are so slow. And they don't have much of a work ethic."

Whaley, who starred in "Swing Kids," had little interest in JFK conspiracy theories before becoming involved in the Oswald project.

"The single-bullet theory is fascinating," he said. "I became convinced Oswald did not act alone. There are too many inconsistencies in the Warren Commission. Lee Harvey Oswald was a very sneaky, shady guy who was mysterious. But he was a follower, not someone who could have dreamed this up. He got in way over his

head." While the film covers no new ground, it does hint that Oswald was working for someone within the U.S. government. In one scene, he returns to his Dallas home in a car driven by several dark-suited, FBI-like men.

"The director wanted to maintain an ambiguity," Whaley said. "They were either CIA or covert government groups priming Lee in this assassination."

Whaley said Helena Bonham Carter, who plays Marina Oswald, did not physically resemble Oswald, but she worked on small details to resemble the character. "She was interested in the way she smoked," he recalled. "She also worked very hard on her Russian accent."

Oswald was little help to Carter. "We all talked about how contradictory she was," he said. "She would be adamant about something and then suddenly forget things. You forget that this woman has been through a lot."

Even though he met Marina Oswald, Whaley remains puzzled by her.

"There are so many dimensions to her, I don't know how to describe her," Whaley said. "She is very brave. She is a woman who came from the Soviet Union and her husband was arrested and assassinated. She remarried and raised her children to be independent healthy adults, and she now lives happily outside of Dallas. I wanted to please her. I had this irrational fear she would not be pleased with what I had done."

Politicians, celebrities remember JFK's death

By Frank Swertlow
Daily News Television Writer

Larry King, whose CNN talk show has become one of American politics' major electronic forums, met John F. Kennedy just once, when he literally ran into him on a street.

"It was in '58," King said. "I was driving through Palm Beach with three friends, enjoying the sights, when I ran into a convertible at a red light. It was just a tap but the guy got out and said, 'How could you hit me? There are only two cars on the road!'"

King offered to exchange licenses. "He shook his head and said, 'I'm Sen. Kennedy, and I'm going to run for president in 1960. I want all four of you to vote for me.' We all agreed to do so."

On Sunday, King takes a look at the assassination of President Kennedy in a live CNN special, "Where Were You?"

Among the celebrities and politicians joining King to reminisce about Kennedy's death and its impact on them are President Clinton and his wife, Hillary; Vice President Al Gore; former presidents Richard Nixon,



Larry King
"Where Were You?" special

Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford; Walter Cronkite; Sean Connery; Barbra Streisand; Jerry Lewis; Henry Kissinger; Sean Connery; and Judith Exner, Kennedy's reputed lover.

King has been collecting interviews with celebrities on this subject for more than two decades. "We have 60 clips," he said.

In the special, King will look at how the celebrities and politicians reacted and how the assassination changed their lives. A studio panel will include Dan Rather, Ben Bradlee and JFK's former press secretary, Pierre Sa-

linger. "Then we will take calls," King said.

King said he was most affected by the story of Streisand, who was in Tiffany's jewelry store in New York.

"She was buying her first expensive piece of jewelry and it was \$800," King said. "They didn't have credit cards then, and she paid cash for a brooch. Just as she was leaving, she heard the news. She just ran into Central Park, not knowing what to do. She met her husband, Elliott Gould, just by accident. She never wore that brooch."

Where was King on the day Kennedy was shot?

"I was driving in my car, and as soon as I heard it, I spun around," he recalled. "I was doing radio and TV at the time in Miami, and I went to the radio station, WIOD. They asked me, 'Is there anyone you can call?'"

King remembered one man. "I knew the ambassador to Ireland, Grant Stockdale, an old dear friend of Kennedy's," he said. "He was beyond grief. They grew up together. Five days later, he killed himself, jumped out of his office window. The only thing on his desk was a copy of Life magazine with Kennedy on the

cover." King had just seen Kennedy the week before at the Americana Hotel in Miami. "I was in the third row, watching him speak," he said.

The killing had a profound effect on him. "I was paralyzed," he said. "People were walking around the streets in a daze. I remembered Roosevelt's death. I was 12 years old and in Brooklyn. The grief was like your father died. This wasn't like your father. This was different. His youth, his vigor, and the thought that if he could die, anyone could die. He was a prince."

While King's talk show has become the place to be these days if you are a politician, he has no plans to run for political office.

"I have more power, more fun," he said. "And the pay is better."

With the next presidential campaign three years away, King won't be sitting idly by his telephone in Washington waiting for the next White House aspirant. He plans to take two major foreign trips to chat with world leaders. He also is adding a sixth show to his schedule, "Larry King Weekend," which debuted last month and will feature an emphasis on celebrities.

Kennedy

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They discuss hearing news of the assassination and the impact it had on their life and their circle. President Clinton and Vice President Gore also give their memories.

The taped interviews will be woven around a live, round-table discussion, according to TNT.

It is scheduled to include newsmen David Brinkley, Dan Rather and Pierre Salinger (who served as Kennedy's press secretary); former Washington Post editor and Kennedy confidant Ben Bradlee; and singer Harry Belafonte, also a JFK friend.

"We will take calls during the panel discussion," said TNT spokesman Jim Weiss. "This is essentially a national forum discussing the impact it (the assassination) had on people's lives in general."

PBS stations will offer several programs on Kennedy, including a three-hour "Frontline" news special on his accused slayer. "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" airs at 9 p.m. Tuesday on KCET (Channel 28).

Daily News television writer Ray Richmond contributed to this article.