

Return to Dallas

30 years later:
a scruffy window,
a sniper's perch

By Michael Dorman

SEXUAL CORRESPONDENT

Dallas — There is no sense of majesty here. The most charismatic president of our time is assassinated in one cataclysmic instant that defines a generation, and it seems reasonable even amid the horror to expect a certain grandeur to accompany an event of such magnitude. But here, at the notorious sixth-floor window where authorities say the deed was done, what is most striking is the oppressive aura of the mundane.

The window bears not a trace of the remarkable. Now preserved at its original site as an exhibit in a museum memorializing the life of President John F. Kennedy and his death 30 years ago tomorrow, it is really two best-up, security windows. One stands atop the other, and a simple sliding latch no different from millions of others locks them both. A wooden brace in the shape of a cross is set into each window.

The bottom window is kept half open, as it was when a sniper presumed to be Lee Harvey Oswald fired the shots that killed Kennedy. Shacks of cartons containing textbooks are piled near the window just as they were on Nov. 22, 1963, to form a sniper's perch hidden from other sections of the old Texas School Book Depository.

To the right of the sniper's perch is a wooden post covered with peeling green paint. To the left are two exposed vertical pipes. The floor that once echoed to the footsteps of Oswald and sundry other workers now appears ill-served by age.

All of that is not to say the place is totally unsurprising. Peering down to the street at the spot where Kennedy was shot, just over the tree branches the assassin saw, it seems remarkable just how close the sniper was to his target. Conspiracy buffs have argued that it was a difficult shot. But, from here, it seems relatively easy for a reasonably proficient marksman with a scope on his rifle.

But there are many other conflicts between the accounts given by authorities, notably members of the Warren Commission, and conspiracy advocates — conflicts over not only the scene at the sixth-floor window but other scenes involved in the assassination and its aftermath. The Warren Commission concluded that a rifle found on the sixth floor belonged to Oswald, that his palm print was on the weapon, that

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Jackie Onassis, once the staid widow in black veil, has kept the myth of Camelot alive



AP Photos

Jackie: Oh, How She's Fascinated Us

By Anreonna Hartocollis

SEVERAL WRITER

New York — You might find her taking her grandchildren to a playground in Central Park, in the shadow of her Fifth Avenue apartment. You might spot her jumping into a cab outside her office near Rockefeller Center. You might catch her breezing into the Hotel Carlyle — the familiar dark glasses shielding her gray-blue eyes, a crisp pair of trousers disguising her bow-legged stride — for lunch with her sister.

She seems so near, and yet so far. To the millions of Americans who have watched her with unflagging fascination for more than three decades, she is Jackie O, one of the most famous women and untarnished symbols in the world. Once, as an impossibly young first lady, she represented the pristine image of American womanhood and motherhood. Later, she became a celebrity who in her zeal for privacy, and cleverness at achieving it, rivals only the late Greta Garbo. Yet, in her latest incarnation, she has managed to remain mysterious while asserting herself as a modern American woman, a working mom and grandmother who can more than hold her own in the cutthroat world of New York publishing.

Tomorrow, as the nation marks the 30th an-

niversary of President John F. Kennedy's assassination, it will be Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the staid widow in a black veil, who keeps alive the myth of Camelot. She is the enduring icon of an era of shattered hopes and lost illusions, who seems to accept her role without calculation, but rather with dignity and resignation.

"She's the closest thing we have to American royalty," says Sam Stafford, a Jackie-watcher who tells the Onassis story through walking tours of her favorite haunts. "She could be walking toward you half a block away and you'd recognize her. Even in a black veil, she is like a magnet over."

What does Onassis touch in the American psyche that makes her appeal so lasting? How much of what we know about her is the woman, and how much is just the myth? For all the unauthorized biographies that have been written about her — at least 25, by one count — we seem to know very little about her inner life. Even as biographers like C. David Hermann, author of the national best-selling "A Woman Named Jackie," purport to give us the most intimate bedroom details, we feel that we have not deciphered the woman herself, what she is really

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To hear excerpts from radio reports at the scene of the assassination in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, call (516) 843-5454 from a Touch-Tone phone and enter category number 3900.



Recalling JFK, And Dallas, 1963

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three cartridge cases found near the window were fired from the gun and that it was the murder weapon. That evidence helped lead the commission to the conclusion that Oswald was the lone killer. But some conspiracy buffs challenge all those contentions, claiming the ballistics and fingerprint evidence was faulty or fabricated and that the fatal shot came from somewhere other than the sixth-floor window.

Some argue that the fatal shot came from the so-called grassy knoll to the right front of Kennedy's motorcade. Such a shot could have hit Kennedy from the front, as some conspiracy advocates maintain. But official versions insist that three bullets were fired at the motorcade, all from the rear.

Near the grassy knoll stands a stone pergola built a half-century ago by the Works Progress Administration. Regularly stationed there, overlooking the habitually heavy traffic along the old motorcade route, is a slim, dark-haired man named Ronald Rice, who describes himself as an investigative reporter. Rice has a VCR plugged into an electrical outlet at the pergola. Endlessly, he shows tourists videotapes of the assassination and related events. He sells two tapes for \$5. He also sells a newsletter called "The Warren Retort."

After the assassination, it is known that Oswald made his way by bus, taxi and foot to his rented room in a house at 1026 North Beckley. He was living there under the alias O.H. Lee. A housekeeper at the rooming house saw Oswald enter and told him Kennedy had been shot. Oswald did not reply, but hurried to his room. Three or four minutes later, Oswald rushed out of the room. "Oh, you are in a hurry," the housekeeper said. Oswald left without a word.

Gladys Puckett, Oswald's landlady, still lives in the two-story house with white lattice-work trim and red roof shingles. A statue of a lion stands out front. Gladys Puckett has a seemingly gentle round face and wears her gray hair pulled high atop her head. "I can't tell you anything provable about Oswald except that he used the name Lee," she says. "He was a very good roomer. He never gave me any trouble. He never did anything to make me suspect him."

Some conspiracy theorists have reported that a police car stopped in front of the house and honked its horn while Oswald was inside. They have speculated that one or more Dallas police officers were involved in the assassination. But no proof of the police car's presence has ever been offered. Gladys Puckett was away from home at the time Oswald came in and says she knows nothing of the supposed police car.

Before moving into the rooming house, Oswald lived with his wife, Marina, in a nearby apartment at 214 West Neely. It was there, in a yard behind the small apartment house, that many photographs of Oswald were taken, including one that showed him holding the rifle later identified as the weapon used in the assassination. Conspiracy advocates claim those pictures were doctored, but photo experts pronounced them genuine.

The Oswalds' apartment is vacant. The yard where Oswald posed for the pictures is overgrown with weeds.

About 15 minutes after Oswald left his rooming house on the day of the assassination, he was spotted by a passerby at the corner of 10th Street and Patton. As it happened, a police cruiser driven by Officer J.D. Tippit was rolling through the neighborhood. By that time, police had broadcast a pickup order for Oswald because he had disappeared from his job at the book depository.

As Tippit got out of the car, he was shot and killed. The Warren Commission concluded Oswald had killed him—a judgment, like many others, challenged by the conspiracy theorists. A gun later found on Oswald was matched to the bullets that killed Tippit.

Shortly after Tippit's murder, the cashier at the nearby Texas Theater called police to say a suspicious-looking man had just slipped inside without paying. Officers hunting for the killers of both Kennedy and Tippit swarmed to the theater. The house lights were turned up, and the cashier pointed out Oswald as the intruder. Officer M. N. McDonald walked toward Oswald, who was sitting in the fifth seat from the right in the second row from the back of the center section. He told Oswald to get to his feet. Oswald rose, raising both hands. "Well, it's all over now," Oswald said.

He punched McDonald between the eyes with his left fist. He then drew a revolver from his waist, but McDonald fought back, punching Oswald with one hand and grabbing the gun with the other. Three other officers then grabbed Oswald and hustled him away.

Among those who witnessed the arrest was Warren Burroughs, who then worked at the theater's candy counter. Burroughs, now 52, recalls: "Oswald's gun misfired while he was trying to get away. I saw the police drag him away. He was yelling, 'Police brutality.' But I never saw any police brutality."

The Texas Theater still stands, but it has seen hard times. The wine-colored seats are faded and worn. Movies are no longer shown there. Community residents are trying to revive it for use in arts festivals. Oswald's seat is no longer in the theater. It was seized by the FBI for evidence.

Conspiracy theorists have argued that there was no reason for swarms of police to descend on the theater, that someone must have set Oswald up for arrest. But that someone has never been identified.

Tomorrow, the assassination site in Dealey Plaza will be dedicated as a national landmark. Nellie Connally, widow of former Texas Gov. John Connally who was wounded by one of the assassin's bullets, will officiate.

Simultaneously, visitors will continue streaming through the museum on the sixth floor of the book depository. Many will sign a guest book and append their thoughts. One who recently did so was R. L. Johnson of Mound Valley, Calif. "Thirty years later, the pain is still there," he wrote.

Michael Dorman, a freelance writer, covered John F. Kennedy's assassination for *Newsday*. His books include "The Secret Service Story."



Oswald



Nov. 22, 1963: Texas School Book Depository, and the sniper's perch

They Still Love Jackie

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thinking behind that glossy, well-bred veneer.

Norman Mailer called her "a historic archetype." To biographer Stephen Birmingham, she is "a riddle." To French fashion designer Yves Saint Laurent, she is, quite simply, the only American woman of style.

Some say she has endured because she has no real mandate, no real responsibilities to her public. She is not a movie star whose fate depends on the latest box office. She is not a politician, like Margaret Thatcher, loved by her own party and derided by the opposition. Despite her political pedigree, she steers clear of what might be perceived as political causes, from presidential campaigns to the feminist movement. She holds no fixed term of office. She is, as Stafford suggests, a bit like an American Princess Di, able to rise above even the cheapest embarrassment, like being photographed sunbathing nude on the Greek island of Skorpis.

"The only thing she has ever done that was questionable in the minds of Americans was marry Onassis. But they even forgave her for that. They still think of her as a Kennedy," Stafford says.

Onassis, who is 64, has not hesitated to use her celebrity to advance causes she believes in. In her career as an editor, which began 15 years ago, after the death of her second husband, Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis, she has developed a niche as a rainmaker, the kind of person who can use her personal connections and aura of glamour to bring in even the most elusive authors. First at *Viking*, then at *Doubleday*, she has nurtured projects by such authors as fashion diva Diana Vreeland, pop icon Michael Jackson, ballerina Gelena Kirkland, journalist Bill Moyers and

singer Carly Simon.

Thomas Guinzburg, who gave Onassis her first publishing job, says that going back to work was her idea. Onassis had not worked since her marriage to JFK, and at first, Guinzburg recalls, she didn't know what kind of work to do. She consulted her friend, Letitia Baldrige, the former White House social secretary turned etiquette adviser. "Tish said something about, well, you've always loved books, and you get along so well with writers."

So Onassis approached Guinzburg, a friend who was then president of *Viking Press*. He hired her as a \$200-a-week associate editor. Her salary, he says, "wasn't a token; it was what other people got." Onassis plunged in, ignoring the skepticism of other *Viking* staff who suspected, Guinzburg admits, that this was all "a public relations stunt."

She was, he says, a hard worker. Onassis was notorious in the gossip columns for having her hair styled at Kenneth's three times a week. But she was just as likely, says Guinzburg, to be in the New York Public Library, doing research. She was also rather shy, preferring to eat lunch at her desk, if she wasn't entertaining a client, than to venture out to the Four Seasons or the Russian Tea Room.

"This is arguably the most famous woman in the world," Guinzburg says. "If you haven't been in that fishbowl existence, it's almost impossible to appreciate how excruciating that can be."

Kent Barwick, president of the Municipal Arts Society, a powerful New York civic group, says that she called him out of the blue one day to volunteer her services in helping to save Grand Central Terminal.

Barwick describes Onassis as both refined and unpretentious. "Is it like dealing with Queen Victoria? No," he says firmly.