

The Selling of Judy Exner's Scandalous Memoirs

by Lloyd Shearer

NEWPORT BEACH, CAL.

Last year Mrs. Judith Campbell Exner, 43, a former Hollywood beauty who resembles Elizabeth Taylor, tape-recorded her memoirs.

They were transcribed, then composed by veteran ghostwriter Ovid Demaris of Santa Barbara, Cal., into a book called *My Story*.

Mrs. Exner's autobiography deals largely with her sex life, which allegedly involved the late John F. Kennedy when he was a U.S. Senator and President. It also deals with Frank Sinatra, who introduced her to the Kennedy clan; Sam Giancana, late head of the Chicago Mafia, and others.

She writes knowingly of such assorted Hollywood characters as Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis, attorney Sydney Korshak, Peter Lawford, Eddie Fisher and Sammy Davis Jr., few of whom she portrays in a flattering light.

She writes, too, of President Kennedy's secretary Evelyn Lincoln, his associates Kenny O'Donnell and Dave Powers, his brother Teddy—and somewhat guiltily of Jackie Kennedy, whose White House bedroom she allegedly usurped on occasion.

The first publication to succumb to this all-star cast was the weekly *National Enquirer*, which paid \$150,000 for excerpts from *My Story*.

\$300,000 already in

The second was *The London Daily Mail*, which paid \$50,000 for serial rights. The *Bungei Shunju* of Japan followed with \$25,000. Ahlen & Akerlund in Sweden, Seura in Finland, Mortensen in Norway, Planeta in

pain and some 32 other publishers throughout the world contributed to the approximate total of \$300,000, 25 percent of which went to ghostwriter Demaris and 10 percent to agent Scott Meredith.

Try as he might, however, Meredith could not get a U.S. book publisher to print *My Story*.



Mrs. Judith Exner kissed and told. Her memoirs, which name President Kennedy, got 55 rejections until one publisher went ahead.

One executive at Simon & Schuster, for example, typified the trade reaction when he said, "We wouldn't handle this book if it produced a \$10 million profit. It would sink our reputation to bottomless depths. What this woman has done to Jack Kennedy is beyond description. If what she says is so, Warren G. Harding was a saint compared to Kennedy."

Publisher after publisher—55 in all—expressed much the same rejection. Some

months ago, however, a chink in their armor developed. Grove Press, Inc., of New York decided to take a chance on *My Story*. They paid Mrs. Exner a token advance of \$1000 and plan to publish her book in June.

As for Mrs. Exner—who resides in Newport Beach, Cal. with her handsome golf-pro husband, Dan Exner, 29—she explains: "I didn't write the book for money. I was simply outraged by the way the [Sen. Frank] Church intelligence committee handled the whole thing in the U.S. Senate. I was also furious at the different Kennedy staff people who claimed they never heard of me."

According to Mrs. Exner, "Someone from the Senate intelligence committee leaked my name to a reporter on *The Washington Post*—this after I had cooperated fully with the committee and had been hassled endlessly by the FBI.

"Then I was called everything from a hooker to a hustler to everything you can imagine. . . . No one seemed interested in the truth, just in destroying me because I had been a close friend of Jack Kennedy, and to so many people he was a god.



Judy Exner with her husband Dan, a golf pro. She says, "I am not a hooker. I wrote to tell the truth, not as part of a conspiracy to defame Jack Kennedy."

JUDY EXNER CONTINUED

"The truth is that when I met him he was a Senator. Call me stupid or naïve if you like, but I was not an angel—and he was not the President of the United States. Later, when he became President and I saw him in the White House, that whole part of our relationship was cumbersome. I never called him 'Mr. President.' He was Jack, just Jack to me, and I thought I was in love with him. I had had a dreadful marriage and I was disillusioned with marriage. . . . So I think that what I had with Jack was a relationship that seemed very safe to me.

"I didn't have to commit myself to him. I wasn't with him all the time. I loved him when I was with him and I loved talking to him.

'Dreadful things said'

"I wrote the book to tell the truth. I am not a hooker. I am not part of a conspiracy to defame Jack Kennedy. The intelligence committee revealed our relationship and the extent of our phone calls. I didn't break the story. It was they who broke it. And then dreadful things were said about me. Not only by Frank Sinatra, but others I had regarded as—my friends—people that I knew, like Jack's secretary Evelyn Lincoln and his assistant Dave Powers.

"When Dave Powers, who used to show me around the White House—I must have been there 15 or 20 times—told the press that the only Campbell he knew was Campbell's Soup, I think that was the breaking point. That's when I decided to do the book and tell the whole truth and defend myself.

"People don't have to believe me if they don't want to. *My Story*, as bizarre and incredible as it seems, has been published in dozens of countries overseas, and none of the characters mentioned in it has sued anyone."

Fear of libel is the basic reason Scott Meredith gives for the difficulty the Exner book encountered in finding an American publisher:

Lawyers wary

"A lot of publishing house lawyers said to me, 'We might have trouble with this one, it has so many big names.' So one publisher after another fell out. Doubleday wouldn't consider it because they had published Rose Kennedy. Bantam wouldn't touch it for the same reason. Viking because Jackie Kennedy works there. Dick Snyder at S&S [Simon & Schuster] had published Teddy Kennedy, so he and Pocket Books wouldn't touch it.

"Even Helen Meyer at Dell, which published *The Happy Hooker* and Elizabeth Ray's story, wouldn't touch it. She said she would, provided the author would indemnify her in case of libel. I told her the author didn't have enough money, but I offered to indemnify her for my 10 percent commission. Anyway, more than 55 American publishers turned it down until Barney Rosset of Grove Press finally decided to take a chance on it.

"I think Barney is going to have a runaway best seller, because Judy Exner told the truth. It may be unpleasant or scandalous," Meredith asserts, "but I am convinced it's the truth."