

Dear Jim,

12/31/96

I've been sent and read the Liz Smith Exner story in Vanity Fair.

Did you do any checking at all?

Or are you so wedded to assassination nuttiness and exploitation that nothing else is real to you, or has or can have any meaning.

I do not know what the truth is but I do know enough about what is not and cannot possibly be true to wonder what in the world you got yourself involved in that for, of all the things you could do and all for which you find no time.

If you have not dedicated yourself to anti-Kennedyism, which puts you on the side of those who killed him and those for whom they did, you know enough about the established and readily available fact to know that Exner is a very big and apparently very persuasive liar.

Some of ^{at} that you knew you could check with me. Some common sense should have told you is not possible.

You had time for this but not for coming up to get what I have that you would use for a client I got you.

And apparently are helping Hersh with the axe job on which he is started.

Of all the things he could do if he really cared about this country.

It is too late now for anything other than telling you I'm ashamed of you!

Harold

THE EXNER FILES

Judith Exner may go down in history as the Scarlet Woman of Camelot—the girl who tied J.F.K. to the Mob—but, with death staring her in the face, she sets the record straight and reveals the shocking end to her affair with President Kennedy

BY LIZ SMITH

Judy Campbell of Palm Springs and Bevhills is Topic No. 1 in Romantic Political Circles," wrote Walter Winchell in his column May 9, 1962.

Of such mysterious little gossip items is history made. I've written thousands of them myself as a columnist over the years. As a child in Fort Worth, Texas, I used to lie on the floor of my parents' modest house studying Walter Winchell's column as if it were the Bible. I wanted more than anything to understand life at the top, to enter Winchell's fascinating world of the Depression 30s and

Walter Winchell
OF NEW YORK AND HOLLYWOOD



Judith Campbell in 1960, the year Frank Sinatra invited her to Las Vegas, where she met her future lover Senator John F. Kennedy. Right, Campbell's enigmatic entrance into tabloid journalism, in Walter Winchell's May 9, 1962, column.

...spised by Lovers Eve, star-teacher June Taylor (once the Awaay-We-Gol & the J. Gleason show) became the bride George Horwich of Chicago Sunday ... Judy Campbell of Palm Springs and Bevhills is Topic No. 1 in Romantic Political Circles ... Quip sweeping the nation: "Know what the doctor advised Liz! 'Take two aspirin and stay out of bed for thr- vs!'"

Letter from Los Angeles

the war-torn 40s. I could just imagine the polished parquet at El Morocco, though I didn't know what parquet was. I did know, however, that not just anybody could pass the golden chain at the Stork Club, but that if owner Sherman Billingsley liked you, you not only got in, but might get a free bottle of Sortilège perfume as well.

Although I became an amateur expert on such things as Edward VIII's romance with Wallis Simpson, and J. Edgar Hoover's strange passion for Shirley Temple, I never imagined that I would find myself in New York in the 50s writing press-agent gossip items for Winchell. Eventually I graduated to working on Hearst's long-running society column, "Cholly Knickerbocker." I even found myself in the soon-to-expire Stork Club, being treated well by the rather creepy Mr. Billingsley, and at El Morocco, where Winchell himself would sometimes pass by and say, "Hi, kid, your copy is great!" Praise from Caesar.

And so, back in 1962, a year before John F. Kennedy was assassinated, I naturally noticed the Winchell item quoted above, but it was what we in the business called "blind as a bat." Who was Judy Campbell, and what did that cryptic little 15-word message mean? It was just a fragment, a note in a bottle thrown into the sea of scandal. Or was it more—a code, a signal, a red alert, possibly even a threat?

Little did I dream then that Judy Campbell would play a large part in my coming years, when I was writing under my own byline for the *New York Daily News*, *Newsday*, and the *New York Post*, where I am now a syndicated columnist for 60 newspapers. Only recently, when I was in Newport Beach, California, with the aforesaid woman, who is now better known as Judith Campbell Exner, did she finally explain what the 1962 Winchell item meant, and how it had come about. She said she herself had read it that May day in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*.

Her lover of two years, President John F. Kennedy, had called her one afternoon in March to tell her that he had just lunched with J. Edgar Hoover. The F.B.I. director had warned Kennedy that the agency was onto his romantic liaison with Judith Campbell, and had told him that the agency felt he needed to know that she was a friend to Mafia boss Sam Giancana of Chicago and Giancana's associate Johnny Roselli of Las Vegas, Nevada.

Hoover himself had strong ties to the Mob, and his position as head of the F.B.I. had become uncomfortable ever since Robert Kennedy had been made attorney general, with power over him. Hoover despised the Kennedys and all they stood for, and he was obviously throwing down a gauntlet to the president, of the I-know-everything-so-you-can't-fire-me variety.

Records show that after Hoover left the White House on the afternoon of March 22 he made a call to Richard Berlin, a top executive at the Hearst newspaper chain. When the blind item ran May 9, it was easy enough to put two and two together. Berlin had obviously passed the information to Walter Winchell, and there had probably been a lot of backstage maneuvering and rewriting at Winchell's paper between March 22 and May 9.

Clearly, Hoover had fired a shot across Kennedy's bow, and the gun he

presidents, shouldn't be philanderers and liars. Only with Chappaqua when a lot of reporters sitting on drinking-and-about Teddy Kennedy senses, did the press. Then came Watergate that all bets were off.

Only now, with most nists dead—many of them and Judith Campbell. Few witnesses left alive understand the 1962 Winchell item. If you were an insider at the time, well and good. If Q. Public and his milingo, it didn't matter. The public knew and were delighted with Winchell and Hoover, two and scandal mongers. That they were more than any mere president. They were in many ways they were country. And in many they were.

The old saying "stranger than fiction" better applied than to Judith Campbell Exner, a woman who made up a story? Or is she the derstood and maligned all of this nation's r. Through the 70s, 80s has been routinely ridiculed by publications as *Newsweek* and *Time* as well as respected as Winchell as *The New York Times*. moved to have been sleeping with F. Kennedy, Sam Giancana, Johnny Roselli at the same time been called a hustler, a bad girl of Camelot, Mata Hari, a bimbo, a Hollywood girl, and a prevaricator. appellations, only the last one is likely to apply.

And Exner had good reason. In 1975 the gossip columnist wrote: "Sources inform me that Campbell Exner's revelation of the Kennedy era wiper from the Kennedy era wiper Kennedy himself in Dallas, Kennedy in Dallas while he Oswald in Dallas while he police protection. Oswald's Mob-related Jack Ruby, did

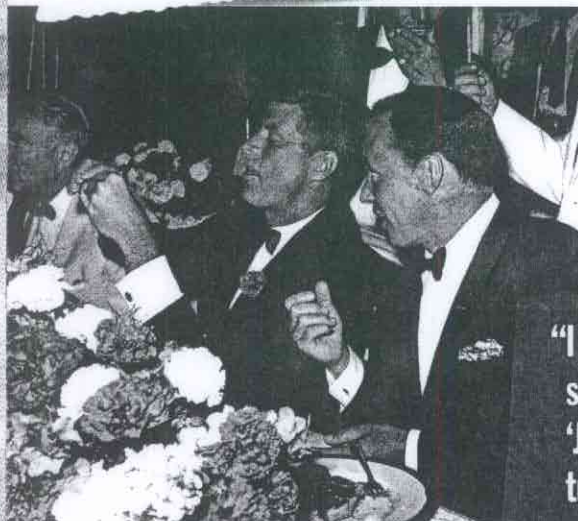
"I was 26 and in love. Was I supposed to have more judgment than the president of the United States?"

had used was Winchell's widely syndicated column. But in those days even the dreaded, all-powerful Winchell couldn't come right out and say that "Topic No. 1" involved the U.S. president. The scandalous doings of V.I.P.'s were still treated very delicately in the press. Today sensationalism is epidemic, and we are all infected, but in 1962 columnists had to be more discreet.

Young people today are amazed to learn that during the time Kennedy was in office there was only "private talk" about his sexual carryings-on, only gossip and speculation—which seldom made it into print—that he might have used the Mob to win elections. Or that he might have been involved in a C.I.A. plot to have the Mafia assassinate Fidel Castro.

Back then there was a gentlemen's agreement that politicians, especially

This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored page, likely an endpaper or flyleaf from an old book. The paper has a slightly textured appearance with some minor creases and discoloration, characteristic of old paper. A small, dark, irregular stain is visible near the bottom center of the page. The left edge of the page shows the binding of the book, with some of the adjacent page visible.



"I just touched his shoulder and said 'Jack,' and he turned back, and that was that. I couldn't resist him."

Ripe for inclusion in this list might also be Winchell's rival in gossip and power, the *Journal-American's* syndicated columnist Dorothy Kilgallen, who

For 35 years the Kennedys have been staples in the gossip columns as more and more about them has surfaced. Just think of Jackie's funeral in 1994 and the sale of her personal possessions at Sotheby's last year. *That's staying power!* I think the Kennedys are the best example yet to support

After reading Judith Campbell's name in the 1962 Winchell column, I never thought of her again until she appeared before the Church committee in 1975. Two years later she published a book, *Judith Exner: My Story*, in which she admitted that she had been intimate with John F. Kennedy, Frank Sinatra, and Sam Gian-

She also told me that she was along in Sinatra's crowd. I was famous for never asking anything. "Men with incredible don't know what it is to have an attractive woman around who doesn't want something from them. I came from a good family, they tell me to think I was a lady."

Letter from Los Angeles

said to me, "You know, you are really stupid. You never walk through any doors that are open to you. Look at all the opportunities you have."

Since 1977 I have printed many more items, even some full columns, on the travails of Judith Exner. Two years ago I received a phone call from the rambunctious, Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter Seymour Hersh, former giant-killer of *The New York Times*: "Liz, you and I are about the only journalists who believe Judith Exner. I want to get her to speak with me. I am doing a book on the Kennedys that is going to be a bombshell. And believe me, it isn't going to be about their sex lives. That will be a mere footnote."

I asked Exner to talk to Hersh, but I never tried to find out what she told him. Then, only months ago, she called and said she needed to see me. "I have something sensitive to talk to you about. It's a hard story for me to tell, but I've told it to Hersh. But I think you deserve to be the one to break the story. You are the one I trust."

"Liz, Hersh is incredible. He has proof of every word I ever said during the Kennedy years. He also has incredible material on Marilyn Monroe. I know he is going to reveal the large part Bobby Kennedy played in the C.I.A.-Mafia-Castro business."

"You know, I used to be at the White House having lunch or dinner with Jack, and Bobby would often come by. He'd squeeze my shoulder solicitously and ask, 'Judy, are you O.K. carrying these messages for us to Chicago? Do you still feel comfortable doing it?'"

"I always said I'd let him know if I didn't. But that isn't my final story for you. You already know I was the courier, handpicked by Jack to go to Giancana. What I want to tell you is my very last secret—an extremely personal one. And I don't want to do it on the phone. Anyway, I think it's time we met."

I leveled with her: "Now, look, you haven't always told the truth. So what can you say to your enemies about that? Who will believe you?" She sighed and answered, "Yes, I know. This will always haunt me, like my stupid book haunts me. But all those years, I was so scared of being killed. I still sleep with a gun under my pillow after all this time. But Sam Giancana's conversations may be released under the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act. They may actually confirm

what I'm going to tell you! I hope they will. The government wants me to talk again. So everything will be released. I must now give up my very last secret. So much is going to come out anyway. Liz, they have so much in Jack's own handwriting. You just wouldn't believe it."

I booked a flight to L.A. and reached for the Exner file, which has never left my desk. I wanted to review the history of this incredible woman. After so many confusing stories, denials, obfuscations, and accusations by the press and the public, I tried to get her life story in order for my own peace of mind. Here's what I set down:

Born Jan. 11, 1934. Middle-class Catholic. Wed and divorced actor Billy Campbell. Ran with show-biz crowd. Brief affair with Sinatra.

Feb. 7, 1960: Invited by Sinatra to Vegas. Met Senator John F. Kennedy and Teddy Kennedy. J.F.K. lunches with her alone. Grilled her about life, Catholicism, family, and show-biz gossip. Campaigning for the Demo nomination, he began calling, sending red roses. Often tracked her down via her mother.

March 7, 1960: J.F.K. and Judith begin 2½ year affair Plaza Hotel, N.Y.C.

March 26 or 27, 1960: Judith at Sinatra party in Miami meets "Sam Flood." He holds her hand, says: "A beautiful girl like you should be wearing real jewels." Judith: "A girl like me sometimes does." Sam tries to pay her hotel bill. She refuses.

April 6, 1960: J.F.K. asks Judith to dine, Georgetown house

with railroad lobbyist Bill Thompson. They discuss campaign. Judith isn't politically motivated. J.F.K. asks her to carry a bag of money to Chicago's Sam Giancana. Judith discovers Giancana is "Sam Flood." She buys her train ticket and takes money to Chicago. Still has no idea who Sam is.

Nov. 1960: J.F.K. is elected. Invites Judith to inauguration. She refuses. He asks her to arrange a Miami meeting with Sam. Then another at her Navarro Hotel apartment in New York, where J.F.K. personally brings Sam money. Later she arranges a meeting at the Ambassador East Hotel, Chicago. Sits on the edge of the bathtub while the two men talk in bedroom.

President Kennedy continues affair with Judith, says he loves her, and asks her to take messages to Sam about eliminating Castro. Judith agrees, begins to enjoy Giancana, who treats her royally. He seems content not to make a pass. Now she is madly in love with Jack, tormented by "impossibility" of situation. (There is one letter to Judith by a J.F.K. aide claiming that presidential pal Kenny O'Donnell "told me, more than once . . . you were really the only one who the president ever loved.")

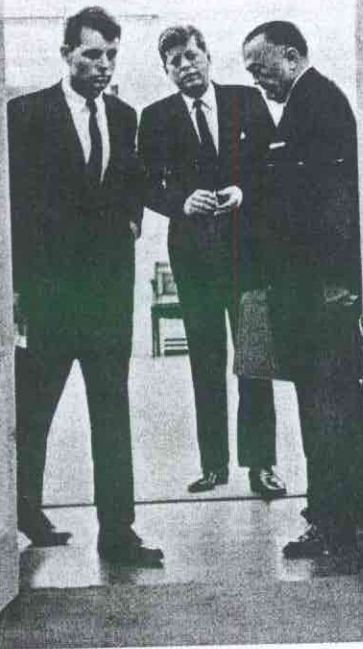
She begins to understand that Giancana is a man of influence and power. J.F.K., jealous and possessive, urges her not to "spend

"President Kennedy continues affair with Judith, says he loves her, and asks her to take messages to Giancana about eliminating Castro."

Judith Campbell, top, carried messages from President Kennedy to mobster Sam Giancana, right, about to appear before a grand jury in Chicago, 1965. Top right, Giancana's Las Vegas associate Johnny Roselli.



Letter from Los Angeles



too much time with Giancana, or Sinatra." He calls constantly, pumps her about whom she has seen. Both J.F.K. and Sam offer gifts. She accepts diamond brooch from J.F.K. and charm bracelet from Sam, but nixes offers of houses, Washington apartments, and money.

President insists she move to Washington. "I can protect you here!" Exner says F.B.I. has begun ringing her doorbell, entering her apartment without a warrant, stopping her in parking lots, harassing her.

Giancana rails against J.F.K. and says, "If it weren't for me, your boyfriend wouldn't have been elected." Says "Kennedys are no good and will ruin your life." Never mentions his own connection to the C.I.A. or what he and J.F.K. are up to regarding Castro.

Aug. 4, 1962: Marilyn Monroe dies. Two days later, Judith's telephone records disappear, just like Marilyn's. F.B.I. watches break-in at her house and does nothing to stop it.

Dec. 1962 or Jan. 1963: She ends unhappy idyll with J.F.K. Arguments over her moving to D.C. He wants her at White House V.I.P. parties and state dinners. She is tormented by thoughts of Jackie. Finds her life as "the other woman" too lonely. "I couldn't handle it anymore!"

Nov. 23, 1963: Judith learns in L.A. that J.F.K. has been assassinated.

Sept. 20, 1975: Promised privacy, testifies before congressional Church committee.

Dec. 17, 1975: Judith holds San Diego press conference to try to clear name. Press goes crazy. Time dubs her "Mobsters' Moll." Judith's theory: "This revela-

tion about Jack, me, and the Mob was the first black mark against his legend. Jack was dead, and Jack and Jackie were already myths, so someone *had* to be the villain, and they chose me."

1977: Judith Exner: My Story published: Judith freaks out. Despises her own book. She and Dan flee to California. Drop out. She claims F.B.I. continues to harass her.

That's as far as my "history" went. There was a lot more to come, but I couldn't have imagined it then.

Is there anything to substantiate Judith Campbell Exner's story? Private research files on Kennedy, Exner, Giancana, and Roselli exist in Washington. I

When The Washington Post's Ben Bradlee checked up on Exner, he found that she had all the correct J.F.K. private phone numbers.

have looked over many of the so-called Exner files, in large photo-album books of material weighing at least 20 pounds each. These are just the bare bones of her case. Although the records don't prove everything Exner says is true, they *do* prove that she was always where she says she was on certain dates. The clips also prove that J.F.K. and Giancana were in the places she says they were. She has canceled personal checks for her hotel bills, plane tickets, train tickets. She has newspaper items, datebooks, and photographs.

While telephone logs of the 1,000 days of the Kennedy administration show Exner calling J.F.K.'s secretary Evelyn Lincoln more than 80 times, there are also calls from Lincoln to Exner. And the president often called her on a private phone. At the time of the 1975 Church hearing, Lincoln described Exner to reporters as a Kennedy campaign volunteer. Later she seemed to deny even knowing her. But

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tle "nothing" of a half-assed investigation ruined the life of Judith Campbell Exner.

The report was written by Senate aides and underlings. No U.S. senator ever actually asked Exner a single question. Between 1976 and 1978, the House Select Committee on Assassinations wanted to go to California and talk to Exner secretly. She refused. She asked for an open hearing so that her testimony couldn't be distorted or leaked in selective parts. The government refused.

Back in 1975, Senate aides asked Exner rather pointless questions. First they established that she'd made phone calls to the president, and they spoke of "the presidential log." Exner said she knew nothing about such telephone records. She said she didn't even realize the committee had files on her. She was asked if she knew Johnny Roselli's girlfriend, singer Betsy Duncan. Exner said yes, slightly. Did she have a business relationship with Roselli? Exner said no. How did she meet Sam Giancana? At a Frank Sinatra party in Miami, said Exner. She told them she had a friendship with Giancana. Had she taken money from either Roselli or Giancana? She said no. They wanted to know if either man had asked her to communicate messages to or set up meetings with the president. She said no. But nobody on the committee or in the press ever asked if the president might have initiated meetings or asked her to make contact. So Exner did not elaborate. She didn't want to end up like Giancana, dead in his kitchen, his mouth stitched with bullets—the Mafia mark for a squealer. "I thought if people saw my nice California-girl face and I spoke simply, they would leave me alone," she said. "They" didn't.

William Safire questioned on December 16, 1975, whether the Mafia had "encouraged" her. Exner says he had it exactly backward. It was Kennedy, not Exner, who brought the Mob into the White House. Later, Exner made a fatal decision to fight back against the government that had forced her

to reveal herself. But the decision to write a book with Ovid Demaris was a bad one, and the untruthful, silly, girlish "fiction" that appeared in 1977 has haunted her ever since.

She claims that harassment by the F.B.I. during this period kept her from cooperating effectively with Demaris, and that large amounts of false information made their way into *Judith Exner: My Life*. The money she earned from Grove Press was all taken by the I.R.S., which had a case against Dan Exner. When she was given the Demaris manuscript to look over, she quit reading after the opening section. She says she threw up her hands and virtually retired to California. She became a recluse. But the book, which sold 45,000 hardcover copies and 100,000 more in paperback, still torments Exner. On the flyleaf of my copy she has written: "My dear Liz—If reading this makes you ill, don't worry, it does the same thing to me. Sorry the first page is missing. It was the best part. It was blank—My Love, Judith."

Judith Exner has explained to me, "I was a basket case of nerves then, racked with fear and guilt. The book made me into a vapid kind of party girl, and that just added to the newspaper attacks and myths. It has me saying things such as I was now ready to party. Or saying Jack wanted us both to run away to a desert island. Or saying Jack played the *Camelot* music for me. It has all this

stuff about Jack eventually demanding to be 'serviced,' on his back in bed.

"Actually, I tried to tell Demaris that, as our affair went on, Jack became more demanding and possessive of me. Never less ardent. People have used this book for years as an incorrect source for incorrect reasons. Much of the information in it never happened, including my much-vaunted 'affair' with Sam Giancana. But I liked Sam. He was wonderful to me. I liked Johnny Roselli, though I was never intimate with him. Sam was a reassuring friend to me. He honestly liked me. Jack told me he was 'working with us' against Castro, so I never considered Sam to be an ogre! There was no depth to any of the book, but it was my own fault. I copped out during the writing for fear of my life. I have only myself to blame." (Demaris could not be reached for comment.)

After trying to sink from sight in California, Exner became ill. She had a radical mastectomy, then lost a lung to cancer, followed by radiation, chemotherapy, and depression. After living through her husband's brain tumor, she ended her marriage and lost track of Dan Exner completely. Today she requires \$700 a week for her medical prescriptions. Her doctor Kim Margolin states, "She is a City of Hope patient with advanced metastatic

The White House telephone log for August 8, 1961, and her calendar for May 6, 1961, substantiate Judith Campbell Exner's claims to a relationship with John F. Kennedy. Opposite, F.B.I. chief J. Edgar Hoover with Bobby and Jack Kennedy in the White House, February 1961.

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

TELEPHONE MEMORANDUM

TO: [Handwritten: Lincoln] FROM: [Handwritten: Exner]

DATE: [Handwritten: Aug. 8]

TIME: [Handwritten: 9:14]

RE: [Handwritten: Mrs. Exner's call to the President's office]

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Letter from Los Angeles

breast cancer, which is incurable and terminal. Despite lung resection . . . chemotherapy and hormone therapy, her disease is growing in the lung and in the bones, causing severe pain and progressive respiratory distress."

In the years of the Exners' self-exile, they became phone pals with my New York office. We got health bulletins, word of libel suits' being filed, stories of F.B.I. harassment and hardship. As the 70s rolled into the 80s and 90s, I began to feel, along with my aides St. Clair Pugh and Denis Ferrara, that Judith had been consigned to our care.

One day, the Washington writer Kitty Kelley called to say that she had heard that Exner's house had been fire-bombed. Exner had disappeared. We were very worried. Saint picked up the often inaccurate Exner book and reread it, looking for clues. Seeing that she had a brother, he called every Immoor (her maiden name) in the U.S. until he located him, and the brother had her call us. She was O.K., she said.

In 1988, Exner came to another watershed of fear, worry, and need. She'd heard that J.F.K. had taped conversations in the Oval Office and that the F.B.I. might release wiretaps on Giancana. She knew that they had tapped her phones for years, "but then, I never had anything interesting to say after Jack died—not even before."

Exner believed that she should write the story of being a courier from Jack Kennedy to the Mafia—at his insistence—before someone else did. "Couldn't you do it, Liz?" she asked me. "Everyone else has cashed in on my life. But I have always supported myself with family money. I have never taken money from anyone. I waived alimony from my first husband, and then Dan disappeared, leaving me his I.R.S. bill. I want a reputable journalistic presentation. I know I could probably get big money from the *Star*, the *National Enquirer*, and tabloid TV, but I have always refused."

I talked to news editor Hal Wingo at *People* magazine. I felt that Exner needed a more sensational byline than mine to call attention to the story—someone like Kitty Kelley. Exner reluctantly agreed. She and Kelley split \$100,000, and *People* had a big scoop about how J.F.K. had handpicked an innocent young woman to carry both money and messages to the Mob.

Kitty Kelley's story for *People* was beset with problems. The magazine's editors say they had to restructure and

rewrite. Exner says today, "Kitty was not interested in the historical reality that two powerful forces, the presidency and the Mafia, had used a girl to carry election bribe money and then information about murdering Fidel Castro. Instead, Kitty wanted me to describe Sinatra's bedroom . . . exactly where was the bed? She drove me crazy. Later, on *A Current Affair*, she blatantly lied, saying I had slept with Jack Kennedy and Sam Giancana simultaneously. She knew this was not true! . . . She wanted to imply that my son, David Bohrer, who was born 18 months after Jack died, might be the president's child." Exner gave the baby up for adoption in 1965, feeling that her situation with the F.B.I. would make his life impos-

Exner gathered Barbara Walters and Phil Donahue into the growing coterie who believe in her. Add Larry King to the list.

sible. Years later, the boy, who is a *Los Angeles Times* photographer, searched for his birth mother, and today they are close. This is one of the few happy endings in the Judith Exner story. (Kitty Kelley responds: "Both Kennedy and Giancana are gone, and unfortunately Exner's stories, as related and/or reported over the years, have changed several times. . . . Contrary to her assertion now, I pushed her hard in 1988 to tell the truth about everything, including her child. . . . I urged her to set the record straight. She refused to do so.")

In spite of the struggle, the *People* story, published February 29, 1988, provided a smashing coda to the pathetic 1975 Church hearings, which had first flung Exner into the limelight. Exner had added another dimension to her incredible tale. And I had my regrets that I hadn't written the story.

Later that year, I persuaded Exner to talk to Barbara Walters in order to call attention to the story. She spent a day in the ABC journalist's Bel Air house, and the two women liked each other. Walters

was to get back to Exner about an air-date, but she delayed. Exner went on the Phil Donahue show instead, but she gathered both Barbara Walters and Phil Donahue into the growing coterie of reporters who believe in her. We can also add Larry King to the list. And Exner claims that Anthony Summers, the author of biographies of Marilyn Monroe and J. Edgar Hoover, has offered to supply a foreword should she write another book, subject to seeing the content.

Like any real star, Judith Exner arrived 45 minutes late for our first face-to-face in the Four Seasons Hotel in Newport Beach last summer. I had ordered a lavish lunch for her and her neighbor and friend of 19 years, Felicia Folino.

They came in like two visions out of a 40s movie, where the beautiful leading lady (let's say Judy Garland or June Allyson) has a wisecracking girlfriend of the Nancy Walker stripe. It seemed fitting. Exner had lost her good name along the way to fame and infamy, but she was still "the pretty one," the star, and she could call the shots. Folino, supportive and good-natured, had heard it all before.

Judith Exner and I embraced like old friends, which we'd become on the telephone over the years, and she launched into an opening anecdote. "We had an omen coming here. There was a car we were following—a Stealth. Good name, huh? And there it was; it had a vanity license that read CHICAGO SAM. Liz, this has to be a portent of our meeting."

Exner will be 63 this month. This so-called Scarlet Woman of the Kennedy Era, mature but still pretty, was wearing a navy-blue pantsuit, a white silk blouse, and tasteful pearls. She still keeps her dark dyed hair as she wore it for Jack, almost shoulder-length. Her bright-blue eyes are serene and quite lovely. She rivets you with her soft-spoken manner and refinement. Her slightly retro look reminds me of a southern belle, albeit a Southern California belle.

She told me she doesn't go out much anymore, and never at night. It takes her several hours, she says, to see anyone, because first she must prepare. She takes a long hot bath, gives herself a manicure, and applies a careful makeup. She feels she has to look just so and conceal her illness or she can't function. There is about her still the slightly spoiled and pampered air of an upper-middle-class post-deb who was expected to marry well. She brings to mind the brunette Brenda Frazier types that Peter Arno used to glamorize in *New*

Letter from Los Angeles



Democratic senator Frank Church, left, headed the congressional committee that questioned Judith Exner in 1975. Below, Exner with her husband Dan, left, and attorney Brian Monaghan at a press conference, 1975. Opposite, Exner in 1988, wearing a brooch Jack Kennedy gave her.



waiting for Jack, at our first real rendezvous, that single bed just got bigger and bigger by the minute—

and more and more ominous. When he arrived, I was so guilt-ridden that at first I said no, I couldn't go through with it. He was very nice, but disappointed, and turned to go. I just touched his shoulder and said 'Jack,' and he turned back, and that was that. I couldn't resist him. You can't believe his charm when he wanted to turn it on."

I said I could indeed—that I had known a num-

ber of women who had gone to bed with the 35th president. Exner looked thoughtful. "If I had known that there were other women... like Mary Meyer, seeing him at the same time at the White House... if I had known, I'd have ended it. Imagine how naïve I was. Anyway, I was having quite enough trouble with the fact of his wife."

"So we're going to talk frankly," I said. "What do you have to say? What are the final words of Judith Exner? Or, paraphrasing Edward G. Robinson in *Little Caesar*, 'Mother of mercy! Is this the end of Judith Exner?'"

She laughed. "Well, you can believe me. I sat on this secret because I guess I was too ashamed. I never, never intended to tell this story, but because of the release of new documents I need to tell it. I was a child of my time, a typical California girl. It was too sordid for a nice Catholic girl like me. But now, before I die, I think the Camelot myth should also be demystified, and the Kennedy legend examined for its reality. I don't have a single, solitary thing to hide. There isn't anything that could ever be proved about me that would be harmful. Women aren't the only poor sinners in the world. Far from compromising the Kennedy presidency, I would not have gotten involved with Sam Giancana and Johnny Roselli had Jack Kennedy not asked me to do so."

"Before you go on," I said, interrupting her, "tell me all this coincidence was

just a coincidence that J.F.K. pick you for his a brief acquaintance?"

Exner frowned. "I was and innocent. I don't planned far ahead. It just for him. He didn't trust eliminate Castro, and he with the Mob himself. Jack instincts about people. He he could trust. That's why many Kennedy loyalists was attracted to me and easily manipulate me, and he did. I don't know if ducing Giancana to me as Miami only a short time of it or not. Or if Sam me, too. Actually, I think liked me. I don't believe even knew I was seeing Jack. I gave him the denial. "O.K., so what's the I asked.

She began by saying, "I never told you how I Jack. We weren't getting breakup was gradual. We had arguments on the phone about to Washington, and I refused me at V.I.P. parties we couldn't. The F.B.I. was driving. The romance became more it was worth. Jack begged back and talk, to try again work this out," he said. I went one last time—late December said I wouldn't see him any too painful. But we were in one last time, in the White House loved him with all my heart know if God was punishing went to New York and then came go. I'm in my hotel. I realized. I hadn't been with a Jack—not ever during the whole was stunned. I had some feelings, so I thought I couldn't. I had been in the hospital with chronic kidney problems had endometriosis and been in 1960, so I wasn't always 're-

"I telephoned and said, 'about the worst thing I can tell. I'm pregnant.' There quiet sound, almost a thud. His mark was—and he knew I said the wrong thing—'What are you doing?' Then he corrected and said, 'I'm sorry. What are you doing?' He added, 'Do you want the baby?' I was crying. I said you know I can't keep this child."

Yorker cartoons—a type sitting nude before a vanity mirror, powder puff in hand, exclaiming, "Oh, my God, I forgot the men's favors!"

Although Felicia Folino fell happily onto the feast I'd ordered, Exner did not eat a bite. I could just imagine her on a date in the 60s, the kind of feminine preliberation girl they don't make anymore, who ordered an old-fashioned or a cuba libre or a daiquiri and was a good listener—like Jacqueline Bouvier, whom she resembled. She is careful to emphasize that she enjoys the company of men more than the company of women; other women were often bitchy and envious of her. In her youth she was always compared to Elizabeth Taylor. Men were her life, and men did her in. She says her favorite thing I ever said to her was "Judith, you have lousy taste in men!"

She was in high spirits the day of our meeting. First she examined the suite, pronouncing it beyond our needs. I made a rather tasteless joke, saying, "Well, it's nothing like the little single bedroom at the Plaza where you first gave in to Jack Kennedy." Her smile faded, and I felt I had gone too far. But then she smiled and said, "No, and you know, instead of asking for a better room that night, after I saw what they had given me, I just decided it was fate. I knew I shouldn't be meeting a married man running for president anyway. As I sat there

F.B.I. is all over us, and has been since they first knocked on my door in 1960.' He was very sweet. He said, 'Well, I want you to know it's an option if you want to keep the baby. We can arrange it.' I answered, 'That's an absolute impossibility because of who you are. We'd never get away with it!'

"We talked a few moments, and Jack said, 'Let me call you back.' He did, and we talked again, in fact several times. I realized I had to act. By my calculations I was almost two months gone. Abortion was then illegal. So Jack said, 'Do you think Sam would help us? Would you ask Sam? Would you mind asking?' I was surprised, but said I'd ask.

"So I called Sam, and we had dinner. I told him what I needed. He blew sky-high. 'Damn him! Damn that Kennedy.' He loved to be theatrical, and he always enjoyed picking on Jack. Now Sam had Jack where he wanted him."

I said, "Maybe Sam was also showing you his feelings for you." She smiled. "Well, he did show me his feelings. He said at first, 'I want to ask you something. Of course I can arrange whatever you ask for, and I promise you'll be safe. But if you want to keep this baby, you can also do that.' I said, 'I can't.' Sam leaned forward and took my hands in his. 'Then let me ask you this: Will you marry me?'

"I was so taken aback I burst into tears. I experienced a flood of emotion that should have been directed at Jack, but I was so touched by Sam. It broke me down. I was emotional and needy. I never dreamed he'd say anything like that; I knew he was really in love with Phyllis McGuire. I said, 'Sam, you don't want to marry me.' I was just overwhelmed. And then Sam topped himself and said, 'Yes, maybe, but you deserve to be asked.'

"There are a lot of things that they can say about Sam. But no one can ever take that away from me. That moment when he tried to make it right. And so we were intimate that night, although I certainly wasn't in love with him. I truly believe that not all intimacy is born of lust. A wide range of feelings was involved. It was the only time. It's all a lie in my book that we had a brief affair. It was only once. So much for being a Mafia mistress."

"And the abortion?" I asked her.

"Yes, I went into Chicago's Grant Hospital," she said. "Here are the hospital receipts and the doctor's name. Everything went fine. . . . They didn't dare not do a good job. I remember the

doctors. They treated me as if I didn't exist. I was a body. And I left the hospital on January 28. Sam came and picked me up. I was in the hospital two days. I was out completely for the operation. I used to wonder if the doctor's hands were shaking when he thought of the consequences if things didn't go right.

"After the abortion, Jack was on the phone to me right away, begging me to come back to Washington. I was so afraid of the F.B.I., of the C.I.A., of Sam, of the Mafia, of everyone. Jack kept calling me in California, and I told him I just couldn't go through it anymore. I saw him once after—it's in the records. Funny, it's there, but I have a mental block. I really don't remember it."

The only time Judith Exner ever saw Sam Giancana again was in the post-J.F.K. days, when he left a restaurant in Palm Springs with Frank Sinatra. Sinatra didn't see her, but Gian-

Kennedy Library, who she says escorted her into the White House to his boss many times, claims never to have heard of any Campbell "except the soup."

Although she still fights back, talks to reputable journalists, and exists as best she can, nothing can give Judith Exner back her good name or the 20 years she lost through loving Jack Kennedy for two and a half. She became the unwitting instrument of an arrogant president to contact the Mob. He told her over and over, while the F.B.I. dogged her footsteps asking about Sam Giancana, that she shouldn't worry. "You haven't done anything wrong," he'd assure her. It has always been easier to term Judith Exner a Mafia mistress than to examine what she has really said, and to see what really happened when J.F.K., the C.I.A., and the Mob decided they needed one another.

"Far from compromising the Kennedy presidency, I would not have gotten involved with Giancana and Roselli had Jack Kennedy not asked me."

Herodotus felt history "is what people have said to me, and what I've heard, that I must write down." Herodotus did not say that one thing is true and another is false. Expounding on whether the elevation of Darius to king of the Persians had been preceded by a debate among Persian nobles, Herodotus noted that "the Greeks do not believe this de-

cana looked directly at her without giving any sign of recognition. She felt that he was somehow still trying to protect her.

And so Exner became a footnote to some of the most important history of the decade. Her name became two dirty words to the U.S. press in one of American journalism's most scurrilous and ill-considered episodes, where even much of the Establishment press remains blind to its own closed-mindedness. The desire to make the woman the villain of the piece operated while the Kennedy men, the F.B.I., the Senate, and the Mob, all of whom had used her, went to their places in American legend.

No Kennedy-family member has ever commented on her. J.F.K. aide Dave Powers, the former head of the

bate took place; but I *know* it did."

I'm with Herodotus. In trying to sort out the all-too-incredible saga of the most romantic and dashing—as well as the most decadent and indecent—presidency in all of U.S. history, I can say I know what probably happened, because I've been talking directly to Judith Exner for more than 25 years.

Let someone—just one someone—disprove any part of her amazing story. □



12/20/96

Dear Hal,
What a shame
Sy Herold has
joined The Get
Kennedy Clique!

After the fiscal
failure of his
recent books, he
has gone into
the trash for
cash business.

Hope 1997
is a great year.

Sincerely,
EQ