

The Emergence of Sara Jane Moore

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"... There comes a point when the only way you can make a statement is to pick up a gun."

—Sara Jane Moore's interview with Ellen Hume, Los Angeles Times, Sept. 25, 1975.

By Leroy F. Aarons

Washington Post Staff Writer

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 27—Sara Jane Moore, a 45-year-old bookkeeper, fired a shot at President Ford Monday and missed. Her act, insofar as it can be reconstructed, was impersonal. She bore no special ill will toward Mr. Ford. In fact, until the Saturday before the shooting, The Washington Post has found, she didn't even know the President would be in San Francisco that day.

Then why? The answer is rooted in deep and complex psychological soil; some of it may emerge as Moore, who

calls herself Sally, begins two months of psychiatric examination in San Diego. She was transferred there today.

Clues to the reason behind her act are lodged in the chronicle of her activities in the days prior to the shooting. The following chronology documents the growing frustration, isolation and anger that Moore was feeling. She seemed trapped by her own ambivalence, by her dalliances with the radical underground, undercover police work and the establishment world of elegant clothes and private schools.

It all seemed to come to a head in the four days following the Sept. 18 capture of Patricia Hearst, the 21-year-old kidnap victim-turned-Symbionese Liberation Army convert, whose saga fascinated Moore.

THURSDAY, Sept. 18. Hearst captured! It must have blared from the radio Moore kept on her office desk, constantly tuned to a counterculture station. Later, she would say the arrest had "made a tremendous impact on me." But no one at Floyd Armstrong's building maintenance firm, where she worked, noticed it this day.

Minutes later, near 3 p.m., she closed the accounting books on which she worked several hours a day, for \$100 a week, and drove her beige, 1970 Toyota two miles to Kittredge School to pick up Frederick, her 9-year-old son. He had just started at Kittredge, a posh private school in an upper middle-class section of San Francisco.

She was worried about Frederick, she had told her coworkers. She

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wanted to keep him in private school and it had been hard to place him, because they are very hard to get into. Kittredge had taken him on a trial basis.

As she drove to pick up her son, radios throughout the city were announcing that Catherine and Randolph A. Hearst were rushing back from Los Angeles and New York, respectively, in hopes of reclaiming their daughter.

... Early in 1974, out of the blue, it seemed, Moore emerged from a suburban background of money and several marriages and divorces. She volunteered as a bookkeeper for the People in Need (PIN) program, the \$2 million food giveaway to the poor demanded by the SLA as ransom for Hearst. Moore seemed buoyed by the excitement surrounding those events. PIN failed to satisfy the SLA or the poor for whom the food was intended, and it folded, but Moore extrapolated a new existence and lifestyle from the experience, her acquaintances recall.

She seemed harmless enough, if a little eccentric, to those who knew her then. But she somehow managed to move with ease among several extremes: she visited the Hearsts at their Hillsborough mansion in connection with closing the books on PIN; she became friendly with radicals on the periphery of the Hearst drama, and, in June, 1974, she was recruited by the FBI to keep watch on SLA sympathizers and others.

In the months that followed, she vacillated among roles, never fully carifying for herself or others where she stood. She frequently pleaded poverty (as she would at her arraignment on a charge of attempting to kill the President), but often wore fashion-

plate clothes and somehow managed to pay her son's private school tuition (annual rate: \$1,400). It was never clear where her funds were coming from.

About her life as a radical, she said in recent months, "I was fascinated."

About her undercover existence, she said, "I was intrigued by the whole thing. It was like a grade B movie... I was really enjoying myself..."

FRIDAY, Sept. 19. Moore was nervous, more nervous than anyone remembered in the 2½ months she had worked as a bookkeeper for Armstrong. She arrived at 9:30 a.m., looking to Armstrong "like a typical ranch-type gal," in blouse, blue jeans and a belt with a buckle bearing a black eagle and the letters "UFW" for United Farm Workers.

At age 45, Moore was matronly, broad-based, her chin layered by several tiers of fat. This morning, she barked at some customers and at another employee in an argument over the proper way to fill out orders.

During the morning, she telephoned a friend, Errol Hendra. He remembers that Moore asked him to help her get a gun for self-protection. Hendra was wary. Moore was always asking him to get her guns. Everyone knew she worked for the FBI, he says. Down at the Eye of the Hurricane, the photo offset shop Hendra had run until recently, they called her "the FBI lady." A lot of radicals hung out at the Eye of the Hurricane.

"Go to the police and ask them the legal way to get one," Hendra advised.

"I'm not about to go to the police," he remembers her saying. "Listen, I think they're out to get me. Popeye's people. They're out to off me."

"Go to the police," he repeated. He had heard the Popeye stuff before. Popeye was Wilbert (Popeye) Jackson, a black ex-convict active in the radical community who was murdered along with a woman companion while they

sat in a car last spring. The killers have not been found. A couple of months later, Moore had confessed in the Berkeley Barb that she had been an FBI informant and had spied on Popeye, among others.

"She was a ding-a-ling," Hendra now says disdainfully. "We used to kid her and put her on, and just hope she'd go away. But she never did. She would hang around the shop. You kind of

talked to her like you talked to a child."

Near 3 p.m. Friday, time to pick up Frederick, Moore seemed more hurried than usual, almost frantic.

"Sally, slow down," said Andy Geosits, a carpenter at Armstrong's place. "What's up?"

"I've got something to do," she replied. "Tell Floyd I'll be in on Saturday."

She didn't show up Saturday.

"I knew I was rapidly reaching a point that . . . all of the avenues of taking action were being closed one at a time."

Sara Jane Moore's interview Wednesday with Los Angeles Times Reporter Ellen Hume

SATURDAY, Sept. 20. A clear, beautiful Indian summer day in Northern California. Patricia Hearst was spending her third day in jail. President Ford, making his first visit to California since Lynette Alice Fromme pointed a gun at him in Sacramento 15 days before, arrived in Monterey at 2 p.m. and played golf.

At the same hour, the San Francisco Mime Troupe was performing "Power Play," an attack on the local public utilities, in Delores Park.

Watching were Sara Jane Moore and a woman friend. Someone was passing out leaflets announcing a demonstration at 4 p.m. the next day, Sunday, when President Ford would address the Stanford University Law School in Palo Alto, 30 miles south.

"I'm going to go down there and be in the rally," Moore told her friend.

"Why bother, he's going to be here on Monday."

"Oh, I didn't know that," Moore said, then added, "I'm going to go anyway."

Around 3:30 p.m. Saturday, San Francisco Police Sgt. Jack O'Shea received a phone call from a familiar contact: Sara Jane Moore. O'Shea was part of a special six-person team investigating illegal gun trafficking in the San Francisco area. It had been going on for six months, and Moore, in her undercover cloak, had been helping. In fact, she had been talking to San Francisco Police and the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau about helping to set up a gun dealer and self-described John Birch Society member out in Danville, 30 miles east of the city. Moore resided in Danville in the not-so-distant days when she lived a quiet suburban

existence—before the Hearst case.

In the ensuing conversation, Moore, informer, talked of setting up a gun buy from the Danville collector, named Mark Fernwood, on Sunday. Moore, activist, talked of some ominous plans of her own for Sunday.

"I've been carrying a gun, she told O'Shea. In fact, three weeks earlier, she had purchased a .44-caliber pistol from Fernwood, for \$125, and had been carrying it in her purse.

"I'm going to see if the system works equally for the left as well as the right, and I'm going down to Stanford to test it," is the way O'Shea remembers what Moore told him.

Then: "I'm going to ask you something that will make you recoil in horror. Can you have me arrested?" Yes, said O'Shea, for possession of a concealed weapon.

The conversation ended. O'Shea put Stanford and the Ford appearance quickly together in his mind, and alerted the FBI and the Secret Service.

Moore had been severed by the FBI last June, when she had blown her own cover by talking about her FBI connection in an interview with a local newspaper. But she continued to volunteer tips, and was reimbursed for expenses. Her work with the San Francisco Police Department and the ATF was fairly new. She wasn't that well-known by them.

Dan O'Neil, a local writer and cartoonist, recalls: "When Patty Hearst first got kidnaped and the SLA proclaimed solidarity with all the radical groups, certain groups wanted to disassociate themselves. One was Vencemos, whose spokesman had held a news conference to say that the group was in total disagreement with the bandit tactics of the SLA. Shortly after that, Sara

Jane Moore showed up and took Jeff out to lunch. Jeff came back and said, "She's an informer."

SUNDAY, Sept. 21. Another balmy day. The Sunday San Francisco Examiner announced over eight columns: "Sacramento Robbery Led to Patty." There was a story that E. Howard Hunt had been ordered by someone in the White House to assassinate Jack Anderson. The article on President Ford talked about his upcoming appearance in Stanford today and two appearances in San Francisco, Monday—at the Hyatt-Union Square Hotel and the St. Francis Hotel.

In the morning, according to one report, O'Shea may have gone to Moore's house in San Francisco's Mission District, a large but hopelessly cluttered apartment in a house on Guerrero Street. She had moved there from Oakland, some time early this year. And she had moved to Oakland before that from a \$75,000 house in

Danville, after her divorce from her third husband in 1972.

O'Shea may have seen Moore's .44-caliber pistol. In any event, he told his superior, Lt. Ray Whie, about the implied threat against the President at Stanford. White called the Secret Service and asked:

"Do you want to pick her up?"

"Yeah," said the Secret Service agent.

"On what charges?"

"Maybe some outstanding traffic warrant?"

White said, "She may have a gun in her possession."

He hung up and told O'Shea to call the Mission district station and tell them to stake out Moore's house 10 blocks away.

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O'Shea must have known Moore would not be home until later. She was going to Danville on an undercover assignment for him and the ATF.

At 11:30 a.m. Moore, Frederick and woman friend pulled up in her Toyota at a \$100,000 Danville home belonging to a couple Moore had befriended in the suburban days. She dropped Frederick and the friend off, and after a few amenities, left.

Minutes later, Moore met with an ATF agent named Chuck. Together they went to the immaculate suburban colonial house of gun collector Mark Fernwood.

Fernwood recalls that they may have looked at a .38-caliber, chrome-plated Smith & Wesson revolver that Moore had wanted to purchase, she

said, for a friend in San Francisco who needed protection. No purchase was made.

That was Fernwood's version. Police sources said Chuck asked Fernwood to see other guns—possibly including automatic weapons. But Fernwood didn't show them anything. The couple left.

Moore returned to the Danville friend's house, without Chuck. There she chatted awhile. Frederick wanted to go swimming in the family's pool, but Moore said no. They had to leave because she wanted to attend the Palo Alto demonstration against Mr. Ford.

Moore headed for Stanford by way of the city, where she planned first to drop off Frederick and her traveling companion.

At 2:30 p.m., the Toyota pulled up to Guerrero Street, where police officers Jim Balovich and Charles Anderson were waiting. Balovich spotted Moore, wearing a baby-blue jean jacket and pants outfit and big, mod sunglasses.

"Do you have a loaded gun in your



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Moore: "The security was so stupid. It was like an invitation."

purse?" Balovich asked her.

"Yes," she answered, not seeming surprised by the question.

Balovich removed the gun, which was wrapped in a blue handkerchief, and 11 pounds of ammunition loose in her purse. He took her down to the station and booked her on a misdemeanor: carrying a concealed weapon. He gave her a citation and kept the gun.

"A citation is used when you are reasonably certain that the person's going to appear in court," says Balovich. "We had no reason to think she wouldn't."

He held her until just before 4 p.m. Meanwhile, Lt. White again called the Secret Service. "I told them we had her, we had the gun. We could hold her for them, but we couldn't keep her on the misdemeanor. It was up to them to put on a federal charge if they wanted to. But they said it was all right, they'd take over from there. We assumed from the information we gave them that they would either have

her surveilled or put down (taken into temporary custody) during the time the President was here."

The police released her.

By now, it was after 4, too late to make the 30 miles to Palo Alto in time for the Ford demonstration. Moore rushed to a pay phone and dialed O'Shea. "You did this," she said, angry. "You had me arrested so I couldn't go down to Stanford."

That evening, the Secret Service arrived at her home and ordered her to come downtown for an interview. It lasted for more than an hour, until 11:30. Moore denied she was serious when she told O'Shea she was planning to "test the system." She said she was just shooting her mouth off. They agreed to let her talk to O'Shea by phone.

"I guess I'm in a fine kettle of fish," she told O'Shea.

"Tell them what you told me and you'll be all right."

Whatever she told them, they released her. But, she later told a friend, the Secret Service warned her: "You can demonstrate anywhere you want, but stay the hell away from the President."

(Later on, the Secret Service would say that "she was not of sufficient protective interest to warrant surveillance.")

A friend of Moore's remembers getting a telephone call from her at midnight, from her favorite telephone kiosk near the corner of Guerrero and 18th. Moore was furious.

"She was rambling, incoherent. She felt they were leaning on her—the FBI and the police she had worked for—that they had a hold on her and wouldn't let up. The gun thing, she felt, was just another incident of their letting her know they were in control, that at any time they could pick her up.

"I got the feeling she was trying to tell them that they didn't control her. I believe that's the reason she shot at the President. She's like those informers who get out of control, I've read books about them."

"I have experienced the kind of rage and frustration many people feel. People are driven to act."

—Moore's interview. Los Angeles Times, Sept. 25.
Ellen Hume of the Los Angeles Times.

MONDAY, Sept. 22. Moore didn't show up for work. Floyd Armstrong wasn't too concerned; she had done that before without notice. Moore did a god job, working at her own pace.

Around 9 a.m., she dropped Fredrick off at Kittredge. At 9:15 a.m., reported Ellen Hume, who had interviewed Moore the previous June and who had remained in contact with her since then, received a phone call from

Moore at her office in Los Angeles.

"Like everyone else that day, I couldn't take the call," Hume said later. She was busy on another line.

Later, Moore would tell law enforcement officers how she tried to call others on Monday, tried to get people to stop her. But no one was available. No one took her seriously.

She may have had a sense of how isolated she was: ignored or ridiculed by the radicals, used or (she felt) misused by her agent contacts. Months before she had told reporter Hume how she couldn't figure out what went wrong, how she could have been so valuable just a year ago and was now so shunned.

"I didn't realize when I burned my bridges behind me what it was going to be like when I fell in."

—Moore in June interview with Hume of Los Angeles Times.

Union Hotel to the hotel garage. As the elevator stopped, it jerked, bumping the President's head. "I'm all right, I'm all right," Mr. Ford said as he stumbled backward into the arms of his aides.

Moore parked, and she made her way to Union Square. About that time the President was making the one-block trip from the Hyatt to the St. Francis by limousine, a security precaution. A small group of picketers and demonstrators heckled. One chanted: "Free Patty Hearst, Kill President Ford." He was grabbed by police and hustled away.

Shortly after noon Mr. Ford was inside the St. Francis talking to the World Affairs Council. Moore stood alone at the corner of Geary Boulevard and Powell Street, a block from the side of the hotel from which the President would exit.

Her hair was curly and closely cropped, her face pink and puffy. She wore a turquoise raincoat over tan slacks and a blue sweater.

She talked briefly to Carol Pogash, a San Francisco Examiner reporter who remembered her from the PIN program.

"Why are you here?" Pogash asked.

"Just to see what was going on," Moore said. She appeared composed.

Recalled Pogash: "I didn't ask many questions because Sara always had too much to say. I didn't take her seriously. Not too many people did. And Sara begged to be taken seriously."

Moore moved to the corner of Post and Powell where black limousines waited at the St. Francis' east entrance for the President to emerge.

She later told reporter Hume: "There was a time when I shook so badly, I was sure people around would notice." No one noticed even when she pulled the nickel-plated revolver from her purse prematurely thinking she had seen the President, and then quickly put it away.

Moore waited more than three hours. Shortly before 3:30 p.m., Mr. Ford headed down the short lobby staircase for the St. Francis exit. Secret Service agents, acting on intuition, had warned him against shaking hands with the crowd, which was gathered some 60 feet away across the street, separated by a rope and a cordon of San Francisco policemen.

Taking the advice, the President headed for his limousine. But the car door was shut. He paused for a second to wave to the crowd as the door was being opened.

The muffled sound of a shot rang out.

"The Security was so stupid," Moore would remember later. "It was like an invitation. I'm glad he didn't die."

Washington Post staff writer Stephen Isaacs and special correspondent Robert Joffe, Martin Koughan and Robert Meyers contributed to this story.

At 9:15, around the time she tried to call Hume, she also dialed Fernwood, the gun collector. She got him, and made an appointment to buy that other gun—the .38.

She arrived before 11, and bought the pistol with a \$145 check drawn on the Crocker Bank. She put the .38 in her purse, along with some snub-nosed "wadcutter" shells.

She sped down the freeway toward San Francisco, loading the pistol and praying she'd be stopped for speeding.

She arrived in town at 11:30 and parked in the underground garage beneath Union Square.

Ten minutes earlier, President Ford was riding a freight elevator from a basement banquet room of the Hyatt-