

The Marina Oswald Story

BY MARY ALICE KELLOGG

On the eve of a TV-movie about her life, Lee Harvey Oswald's widow says, 'I'm tired of carrying the burden.'

It's PERFECT MOVIE MATERIAL: A young Russian girl meets an American in Moscow, marries him after a whirlwind courtship, and comes to America. Once here, knowing no English, isolated by an increasingly abusive husband, living in a strange city with two young daughters, she sees her world fall apart one horrific morning as her husband is accused of assassinating the President of the United States. He himself is murdered days later.

Of all the stories surrounding the assassination of John F. Kennedy, that of Marina Oswald, wife of Lee Harvey Oswald, is one of the more poignant and untold footnotes: an innocent swept into history, manipulated by everyone from the Warren Commission to the FBI to assassination theorists, a mother forced

to bear the pariah mark of "assassin's wife" while trying to make some sense of her life in the aftermath. This week, NBC airs "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald." It is Marina's story, the one she has waited 30 years to tell.

Marina Oswald Porter, who today lives quietly in a suburb of Dallas, had resisted previous overtures to portray her. For executive producer Bernard Sofronski ("Alex Haley's Queen"), gaining her confidence was a delicate, two-year endeavor.

"Of all the people I've ever met, she's the one person who shouldn't trust anyone," Sofronski says. "She looks like the weight of the world is on her back. Her whole life changed on Nov. 22, 1963. She's been reliving that day every day, ever since."

Why relive it again now, and on network television? "For a while, the media were



◆ "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald" airs Nov. 15 at 9 P.M./ET on NBC.



Marina Oswald and daughter June (right) at the funeral of Lee Harvey Oswald (below left) in 1963. Helena Bonham Carter (above) as Marina in NBC's "Fatal Deception."

careful when they talked about Lee: They said 'alleged assassin,' " says Marina. "But they got sloppier and began talking about 'the killer, the assassin.' When I spoke out in 1988 and said that I didn't believe we had been told the truth, nothing happened. So, out of desperation, I thought that the movie would be my chance to ex-

plain my position." Her position now is one of disagreement with the Warren Commission. "I do believe that the conspiracy existed and that there was a coverup," she says. "I do believe with all my heart now that he was set up."

"Fatal Deception" covers Marina and Lee's courtship, their marriage, the assassination, and its effects on her and her family from Marina's point of view, ending in 1978 when Marina and her two daughters visit a Dallas memorial on the 15th anniversary of the assassination. "It's not a laugh-a-minute story," says Marina's portrayer, Helena Bonham Carter, a British actress ("A Room with a View," "Howards End") who wasn't yet born when JFK was assassinated. "She's had a unique experience," Bonham Carter adds. "She didn't know what was going on. The challenge was to play it with innocence and not a sense of doom."

For her humane, riveting performance, Bonham Carter viewed archival tape of Marina and worked with a speech coach on a heavy Russian accent. Meeting Marina, who consulted on the film project,

came later, on the set in Moscow. It was only Marina's second trip back since 1962, and she and Bonham Carter were understandably nervous.

"I felt tacky meeting her," the actress says, "because this kind of project is bound to simplify her life." At first, Marina was reserved, caught up in the hubbub of being on a movie set for the first time, saying only that Bonham Carter was "far



Helena Bonham Carter (left) and **Marina Oswald Porter** share a moment on the set of *Fatal Deception*.

too pretty" to play her. But during the Moscow shoot, Marina and Bonham Carter went out in the evenings, listened to music, and bonded. "She was so glad to come back to Russia, after so long away," says Bonham Carter. "She knew she could trust us because the story was very sympathetic to her life."

The producers, aware of the delicacy of the situation, took pains in Moscow to shield Marina from Frank Whaley, the actor who gives an uncanny and powerful performance as Lee Harvey Oswald. Eventually she and Whaley did open a dialogue. "Watching people playing you is unreal," Marina says. "From a distance, in Moscow, when I saw this young couple [Whaley and Bonham Carter], for a moment it was like a pain in my heart. Is that me, a little girl, working there? From a distance, Helena reminded me of me."

Today's Marina, Bonham Carter says, is far from the bewildered deer-caught-in-headlights that America saw in the '60s: "She's very witty and strong-minded. She has a great lust for life. I was struck by her humane perception of it all; she has a wide outlook, and she's not bitter."

Happily remarried for more than two decades, Marina has kept a low profile. When she sold the producers the rights to her story, she retained consulting rights

but no veto. "We sent Marina the script because she had to feel comfortable with it," says Sofronski. She liked some things, but objected to others. "I said, let's skip the intimate scenes," Marina says. The intimate scenes stayed.

What will *Fatal Deception* add to the avalanche of images, perspectives, conspiracy theories, and information surrounding the assassination? "The movie will point more guns to ask what are we hiding from, why not release the information," says Sofronski. In August, the government released nearly one

million pages of assassination-related documents; perhaps twice that much still remains classified. The producers and Marina maintain that until every shred of information is made public, the theories will not go away; the questions will continue to multiply.

No one wants to know all the truth more than Marina. "I didn't ask to be an historical figure, but if I must, I would like to be part of an honest history," Marina/Helena says at the end of the movie. It is a history that is still being written. It is *The Story That Will Not Go Away*.

"I wish it was over a long time ago," says Marina. "There should have been a trial to find him honestly guilty or innocent, and we'd go on with our life."

The events of 30 years ago have taken their toll on Marina: "This big burden on my shoulders lingers and lingers. I'm tired of carrying on. I don't want to be Marina Oswald forever. I don't want to live in the past constantly. Now, in the autumn of my life, I would like to find some few years of peace to live, plant flowers, raise children, and not worry about anything else. This is only a human desire. I could live with a guilty verdict if that's honestly what I believe in. But I simply don't." ■

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