

was ill, that her situation
person in the United States,
was living in Fort Worth with
in trying to phone him in his
him not to defect, but that

Exhibit No. 5—Continued

Oswald in Moscow

by Priscilla Johnson

*What a long, private interview revealed
to one reporter about the troubled
personality of President Kennedy's
accused assassin.*

On a frosty November evening four years ago, I sat in my Moscow hotel room while a twenty-year-old American explained in a soft Southern accent his desire to defect to Russia. With his pale, rather pleasant features and his dark flannel suit, the young man looked like any of a dozen college boys I had known back home. His name was Lee Harvey Oswald.

I had sought him out a few hours earlier on the advice of an American colleague in Moscow. A boy named Oswald was staying at my hotel, the Metropol, my friend remarked casually. He was awry at everything American and impatient to become a Soviet citizen. "He won't talk to any of us," my colleague added, suggesting that, as a woman, I might have better luck.

An American defector was always good copy for a reporter in Moscow, and I had knocked rather timidly at Oswald's room late that afternoon. After what I had been told, I fully expected to be turned away. Instead the young man who opened the door readily assented to an interview. He promised with a smile that he would be at my room at nine o'clock in the evening.

He came at nine and stayed until two or three

in the morning. Throughout our conversation he sat in an armchair, sipping tea from a green ceramic mug. More tea bubbled softly on a tiny electric burner in the corner. Except for a small gesture of one hand or an occasional tightening of the voice, Oswald's manner was unemphatic. His words seemed chosen to rule out even a hint of emotion. Yet in the notes I made as we talked I find, years later, the repeated marginal reminder to myself: "He's bitter."

In spite of his conventional appearance, I found Oswald, from the outset, extraordinary. From experience I know just how formidable the long trip from the United States to Moscow can be, even if the traveler has money and a command of the Russian language. Here was a boy of twenty who, with only the money he had been able to save in less than three years as a Marine Corps private, had come six thousand miles with no thought but to live out his life in a country he had never seen, whose language he knew only slightly, and whose people he knew not at all. It was, I thought, a remarkable act of courage or folly.

I was touched by something homesick about him: the way he had tried, as he told me, to teach himself Russian alone at night in his Marine Corps barracks, using a Berlitz grammar; and how he had been reading economics on his own ever since he had discovered Marx's *Das Kapital* at the age of fifteen. I saw him as a little lost boy and, as such boys often are, rather lonely and proud.

JOHNSON (PRISCILLA) EXHIBIT No. 6

... Oswald impressed me because he was the first and, as it turned out, the only "defector" I met in Moscow. Of the two or three other American defectors I encountered, none seemed to be motivated by a belief in communism. All appeared to be fleeing some obvious personal difficulty, such as an unhappy marriage or a lack of money. My decision is not an emotional one. It was based on a careful analysis of the man and the only just way of life. For this alone he was responsible. In the months and years that followed our conversation, I had thought of him as being one day to write a profile of this highly unusual defector. I never wrote it, however, for I felt that the key to this curious, boy had eluded me.

Dismally Lonely

I have suggested that something about Oswald was never settling that his burial of the emotional nature—and yet, looking back, I have two conflicting impressions. One is that he was surprising in his feelings from himself. The other is of a man who would not be hidden. It was the discrepancy between the two, I suppose, that gave me a sense that there were peeping chips in his armor and that he was too frail, psychologically, for what he had set out to do.

Among the feelings Oswald could not conceal was exactly as to whether Khrushchev officials would grant his request for Soviet citizenship and whether his funds would stretch until he could go to some technical institute. Another was anger against mainly, at the time, against officials of the U. S. Embassy in Moscow. These officials, Oswald felt, had rejected him when he tried to help them, renouncing his American citizenship. There the tension between his feelings and his effort to suppress them became articulate. "I can't be so hard on them, but they are acting in an absurd way."

FORWARD (Pencil) Drawing No. 8—Continued

I had been brought up like any Southern boy in his Negroes. When, at fifteen, I was looking for a key to my environment, I discovered social literature. I saw that the description of life of capitalist conditions was quite correct. It opened my eyes to the economic reasons for having Negroes; so that wages can be kept low. I became a Marxist. To me, it was as though Oswald wanted to converse on both that he had never had a childhood, that he had been all his life a machine chattering social justice.

About his father he was so evasive that I was nonplused. "My father," he told me, "died before I was born. I believe he was an insurance salesman." That was all. Not another word could I pry out of him.

He sounded quite different when it came to his mother. She was ill, Oswald told me, living in Fort Worth with his mother. "My mother has been a worker all her life," he went on, "having to produce profit for capitalists. She's a good or bad actually been doing. I asked whether his mother was disillusioned, like him, or worn-out beyond her years? That's the usual end of people in the United States, isn't it?" he countered. Then came the denial of his own indignation. "It's the end of everyone, in any country. It's a question of why they end up that way. For whom and under what system they work." In spite of Oswald's effort to depersonalize, to blame his mother's suffering on Marxist "social processes," I felt that there was a bitterness too deep for that. Shortly after this he remarked: "I cannot live in the United States, so I shall remain here, if necessary, as a resident alien." Earlier he had told me that even if Soviet officials refused to grant his application for citizenship, "I would not consider anything to the United States." Throughout the interview he referred to the Soviet government as "my government."

Since Oswald had traveled thousands of miles to build a new life in Russia, I expected that he would be wanting no time learning all he could about the country. He would be anxious, I ex-

pected, to see how the socialist economic theories he believed in were working out in practice. That was where I had my biggest surprise. The life he was leading in Moscow was a dismal, lonely one. Most of each day he spent sitting alone in his room waiting for the telephone to ring. If he thought it was his mother calling from Fort Worth to beg him to come home, he wouldn't answer. Every time it rang, though, he hoped it was some Soviet official calling to announce that his request for citizenship had been granted. Oswald seemed to feel helpless in the Russian language. "I was able to teach myself to read and write," he said. "But I still have trouble speaking." The only expedition he had taken on his own in nearly a month in Moscow had been a walk to Deputy Mir, a children's department store, but in the scramble of Soviet shoppers he had managed to elbow his way to the fourth floor and buy himself an ice cream cone. He recalled that he had seen the "whole city of Moscow" and "the usual tourist attractions." But he would not bank a single handshake he had actually visited. For all his struggle to get to Moscow and his effort to stay, he appeared to lack even the curiosity of the ordinary American tourist.

FORWARD (Pencil) Drawing No. 9—Continued

OSWALD IN MOSCOW

Although Oswald claimed that he had visited his parents in their homes, his references left me guessing as to whether he had actually struck up a single unofficial friendship. He would only say: "Moscow is an impressive city because the energy put out by the government is all used toward peaceful and cultural purposes. People here go well off and happy and have so much to look forward to in the future of their country. Materialism is not to be seen here." These generalizations, above all, Oswald's own, walked existence led me to conclude that he was strangely blind. Not only was he not looking at the life all around him, he was making an heroic effort not to see it.

I had a similar surprise when it came to his grasp of Marxist economics. For hours we discussed that, apart from his defection, it was the only thing that seemed to interest him most. Worried that I might be trying to warn him of the danger of commitment which I felt he might encounter in any country, including the Soviet Union, I argued that there are poverty and poverty in every country, but that the Soviet Union was undergoing rapid industrialization. The writer has to read less than the value of what he has created if there is to be capital for new investment. Oswald agreed. To him, however, the

Destroying an Abstraction

In one sense, however, his outlook seemed to fit that of orthodox Marxism. Not once in all our hours of conversation did Oswald so much as mention a single political leader, not President Eisenhower, nor Fidel Castro, nor then Senator John F. Kennedy, nor Josef Stalin, nor Nikita Khrushchev, nor anybody else. If he saw, indeed, that the capitalist social categories—exploitation of the worker, the "capitalist system of production," "imperialist wars"—were explanations enough of the world's ill,

Since this brings us to the assassination, I was impressed by the terrible irony of that deed. If Oswald was, in fact, the assassin, for Marxism has traditionally rejected assassination as a weapon of political struggle. According to Marxist philosophy, those whom we call leaders are the historical forces around them. The latter, in turn, are determined by the economic modes of production. Thus, in the view of Lenin, assassination was at best irrelevance. I doubt that Oswald was aware that he was violating Lenin's writings on individual terror when—and if—he pulled the trigger last November 22. I suspect, rather, that he was not Marxist enough to realize that his was the ultimate anti-Marxist act.

I should like to make another observation that is outside my recollections. Oswald's defection to Soviet Russia could, as it happened, have been a dry run for the assassination, if he was—again—the assassin. For both actions he had to acquire a skill in the one case, Russian, which he had learned imperfectly at the time I met him; in the other, marksmanship, which he evidently mastered much better. Both deeds took months to prepare. For the first he spent, as he told me, two years saving money, learning how to get cheaply to Russia, where to apply for a Soviet visa (Kishinski), and how to go about contacting the

FORWARD (Pencil) Drawing No. 9—Continued

... Oswald officials once he arrived in Moscow...
...for the latter... he had to purchase a rifle in...
...completely... wait for Kennedy to visit Dallas...
...and for a route to be announced, arrange to...
...action himself... along it without arousing sus...
...picion, and so forth. Lee Oswald was a failure...
...at nearly everything he tried. But two extremely...
...difficult tasks he did accomplish. I saw two quali...
...ties in him that could have been crucial to his...
...success in such a single-mindedness and resolute...
...ness.

"For the past two years," Oswald told me,
raising his voice a little, "I have been waiting to
do this one thing [defect to Russia]. For two
years I was waiting to leave the Marine Corps."
Throughout those two years, during which he had
been saving money and learning the mechanics
of defection, he had been so single-minded that
he had never taken care to form the emotional
attachments to girls, since such attachments
might weaken his resolve.

Throughout those two years, moreover, he of...
tenantly concealed his intention to defect from all
whom were closest to him. No one at home suspected
which way his ideas were trending even when, at
the age of fifteen, he began reading Marxist
literature. "My family and my friends in the
Marines," he explained, "never knew my feelings
about communism." Yet he had harbored those
feelings for five years, and for the past year
had been studying Russian at night in a Marine
Corps barracks with linguistics buddies all
around him.

If Oswald was secretive about his personal life,
retaining even to several of his closest friends
a lying, what section of New York City
he had lived in, or how many brothers he had,
he was equally evasive about the circumstances
of his defection. He declined, for example, to say
whether he had informed Inquiries, the Soviet
travel agency, of his intention to remain in
America how much he was paying for his room at
the Metropole, who, if anyone, back in the United
States had advised him on how to go about defect...
ing; what Soviet government agencies he was
dealing with; or his request for citizenship, or
even what books by American communist authors
he had read. "While defection was no doubt ap...
propriate responses to some of these questions,
he was, I felt, making mountains of secrecy where
either boys might have made a molehill. This tight...
lipped, conspiratorial attitude that was already so
pronounced when I met him could, however, have
been inevitable during the long months prepar...
ing for the act of November 22.

Josephson (Prisoners) Exhibit No. 6—Continued

about his intention that from the moment he
was arrested on November 22 it seemed to me
unlikely that Oswald would consent to shooting
the President. Unlike, of course, his relations
were broken by extraordinary methods. If I
understood him at all, I believe that refusal to
cooperate with authority, expressed in a refusal
to confess, would have been nearly as much a part
of the social protest he was trying to make as the
act of assassination itself. In my opinion, the two
would have gone inseparably together.

Another of the fronts in which this case
abounds has to do, it seems to me, with Oswald's
attitude toward Kennedy as a man. I believe that
Oswald may well have been less jealous of
Kennedy's dazzling personal attributes—his
wealth, his good looks, his happy, outgoing in...
general—than many men, to whom the idea of
assassinating the President never even occurred.
Oswald was preoccupied with himself, not with
other men. The good fortune of others, their
riches and fine features, did not define him to
himself as poor or ugly. Less than many men did
Oswald strive to be as "dazzling" as his mar...
ried that man's scope." I believe that the John
Kennedy he killed was not, to him, another
human being who was richer and better endowed
than he, but a surprisingly abstract being, a
symbolic personification of authority. (In a sense,
full scale about Marina Corp officers Oswald just...
asked to me his contempt for anyone in authority
over him.) That Kennedy, perhaps more than any
world leader of his time, happened also to wear
authority with a galaxy and grace that might well
have aroused the envy of others is probably be...
side the point in assessing the motives of Lee
Harvey Oswald.

The Desire to Stand Out

No matter how steadfastly he might have
aided the efforts of his ingulibators to break his
down, I believe that Oswald yearned to go down
in history as the man who shot the President.
Even if he would not and could not confess, in
had, at least, to be caught. For if there was yet
thing that stood out in all our conversation, it was
his truly compelling need—could it have been
response to some childhood humiliation?—to
think of himself as extraordinary. A refusal to
confess, expressed in stolid and triumphant silence,
would have fitted this need. In some twisted way,
it might also have enabled him to identify with
other "outcasts" persecuted victims, such as Scott
and Vasquez and the Rosenbergs.

Josephson (Prisoners) Exhibit No. 6—Continued

...in history with a question mark over his
...surely in another sense he had to be marked
...at all times as the man who killed President
...spandly. Confronted as these two needs—to be
...might yet not to confess—may appear, in reality
...were part of a single compelling desire.
To the trained psychiatrist by this desire must
I believe have been written all over Lee Oswald.
It became apparent to me, however, only after I
had asked several questions arising from a sus...
picion I had that for all his unassuming appear...
ance Oswald was merely another publicity seeker.
When I asked, did ordinary Russians view his
defection? "The Russians I meet," he replied,
"don't fret me as any celebrity." Somehow the
very fact that it made me feel that to himself, Lee
Oswald really was a celebrity.

Later on, I asked Oswald if he would suggest
action as a way out for other young men who
like himself, might be dissatisfied with conditions
in their own country, always being the outsider, always
adjusting." Lesser men, he seemed to imply,
might not be up to it. But he was.
As a means, however, of proving his "differen...
ness." If that is what it was, defection seemed to
have failed Lee Oswald. Back in Texas, people
he ceased after a while to stand out as a curiosity.
To be marked up the extraordinary person he
needed to be, he had to perform a yet more
memorable, and outrageous, act.

The Man from the Alaska Highway

by William Stafford

Some rainy mornings before citizens get up
a foreigner in a white raincoat wanders
the schoolground, appearing and disappearing,
putting multirooms in a plastic sack copped with rain.
I watch through my dim window
way with water from the eaves.
Here's a food builder. He told me once
to move a big freeway seems to wander in level
country the more planned it is: "A straight
road puts drivers to sleep. The knock is
to find the curve and lean the driver's
shoulder needs to find."

Once he told me the Yukon bends millions
of dollars worth even without any gold.
I looked at a map and saw that Alaska, the way
it happens along, can never—no matter what
anyone says—be just a state.
Today I went out at first light.
The food builder wanders around, but I
leaved with my umbrella and saw
hundreds of multirooms, almost hidden,
gleaning here and there,
hanging up through the playground.

Josephson (Prisoners) Exhibit No. 6—Continued

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