

PACIFIC NEWS SERVICE



OSWALD

COPYRIGHT PNS

OSWALD'S MOTHER REMEMBERS

A TREE GROWS IN DALLAS

By Marguerite Oswald
Pacific News Service

*Harold -
For your
archives!
HB*

(November 22 marks the 15th anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Two days later is the same anniversary of his accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald. In the following account, Oswald's mother, Marguerite Oswald, recalls her feelings on the day of her son's, and the President's, funerals.)

Lee Harvey Oswald was picked up by the Dallas police on November 22, 1963, as a suspect in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. For two long days and nights he proclaimed his innocence, always denying he had anything to do with the killing of President Kennedy or Patrolman J.D. Tippitt. We know his face was badly bruised. The pictures showed it. He had black eyes and scratches on his face when I visited him in jail on November 23, 1963.

He said, "Don't worry, mother, I will get an attorney. I know my rights. Please do not interfere."

That was the last time I saw Lee Harvey Oswald, my son, because on the morning of November 24, 1963 he was shot by Jack Ruby while handcuffed in police custody before millions of people who viewed the tragic event on television. He had just turned age 24 on October 18, 1963.

I hope that I will be able to bring something into the lives of those who read this story, and, in some manner, bring about a better understanding of the Oswald family, victims of circumstances over which we had no control.

I have tried to portray our feelings when our beloved son, brother, husband and father was murdered and buried in one of the most heart-rending funeral services, for me at least, that has ever been conducted.

- more -

604 Mission Street • room 1001 • San Francisco, California 94105 • (415) 986-5690

On the morning of November 25, 1963, the day of the funeral, the family was lodged at the Inn of The Six Flags, Arlington, Texas, between Dallas and Fort Worth. We were under the protective custody of the United States Secret Service. My daughter-in-law, Marina, my son Robert, myself, and Lee's two adorable little girls, June Lee and Rachael, were together.

I was told one hour in advance to make ready, that Lee's funeral was about to take place. The Secret Service agents did not ask me if I needed anything, but wanted to know Marina's size because they wanted to buy her a dress. They went into nearby Arlington, Texas, and selected two black dresses so that Marina would have a choice.

They brought Lee and Marina's first born, June Lee, age 21 months, a new outfit and some white high-top shoes. I helped dress baby Rachael, who was only one month and two days old. The baby had no new clothes, nor did I, but this was all right with me, for Marina and June Lee did.

We left to go to Lee's funeral, where services were to be held at 4:00 p.m. in the chapel on the grounds of Rose Hill Burial Park . . . his wife, Marina, his two babies, his brother Robert, and myself. His older half-brother, John Edward Pic, was not present, because he was a career man with the United States Air Force, in uniform at the time, and the government decided it best that he not attend.

Earlier, after Robert had contacted three ministers who would not help us in our sorrow, or take the boy's body into a church, or even participate on the grounds, one minister, after much persuasion, finally consented that we would have chapel services. He refused to bring the body into the church, but finally consented that we would have chapel services.

So much for Christianity as we know it today . . . the laws of our land state clearly that a person is considered innocent until tried by a jury and found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt . . .

There is a beautiful chapel on the grounds of Rose Hill Burial Park on the outskirts of Fort Worth.

Our family did think the minister would keep his word; but when we entered the chapel, it was empty. My son, Robert, cried bitterly because his brother's body was

not there. Lee's body had been brought to the chapel and had remained there for about an hour. But someone ordered the body removed to the grave site.

As we got to the grave, Mr. Paul G. Groody, who was the funeral director from Miller's Funeral Home, came forward and said, "Mrs. Oswald, I'm sorry, but we don't have a minister."

Then Reverend Louis A. Saunders, who is an executive for the Fort Worth Area Council of Churches, stepped forward and said, "Mrs. Oswald, if you like, I will help out."

The Reverend Saunders had not preached a sermon in eight years. He had come to the cemetery on his own, he told me. He had had no time to prepare a sermon, and he had left his bible in his car, parked two blocks away.

The Reverend Saunders began, "We have come here today to lay away the body of Lee Harvey Oswald. We are not here to judge him, but to bury him. May God have mercy on his soul."

Then he turned to newsmen and security men and said, "His mother has informed me that Lee was a good son to her, a good husband to his wife, and a good father to his children."

We insisted upon remaining until the coffin was lowered into the grave. Then Marina went over and picked up a handful of dirt, making the sign of the cross. I was surprised, but assume this is also the custom in Russia. I followed suit, and so did Robert.

As we left the grounds, I noticed a sight I had seen as we came in, and one I shall never forget. The cemetery flag was at half-staff. Of course, I knew it was flying low because our President had died. But to me, you see, it meant also that my son was being buried under a flag that was at half-staff, too. Sometimes there is joy even in sorrow.

The three men who died in Dallas were all buried on the same day. First, President Kennedy, then Patrolman Tippett, then my son.

The pain and sorrow of Lee's burial followed me for many months. It was climaxed in May, 1964, when I was watching a television program about President Kennedy's grave.

As I watched, the scene shifted to my son's grave and I bent forward with renewed interest. But the announcer's next words cut to the bottom of my heart.

"The assassin's grave has on it a dead tree," he said. And a picture was shown of a tree. The leaves had fallen off and it certainly looked dead. Not one time in the past six months had my composure broken, but this time, alone in my house, I broke down and wept uncontrollably.

To hear my son referred to as an assassin without the qualified "alleged" was more than I could take. He was only the accused, had never stood before a jury, never been tried nor convicted. And then there was the picture of the dead tree. I knew nothing about the tree, which was a weeping willow.

I soon learned it had been planted a few days earlier, since my last visit to the cemetery. I did not know who put it there; but it had not been watered, and appeared to have died immediately. I had taken a personal interest in keeping Lee's grave neat-looking, for many people passed by to take pictures for history.

I was determined that by the next Sunday my son's grave would be the nicest looking in that particular section of Rose Hill Burial Park. I drove all over Fort Worth and went to Arlington, Dallas, and finally back to Fort Worth before I found what I was looking for. I was seeking sodded grass, the kind that comes in rolls, already grown. Finally, I found a greenhouse that had the grass.

The greenhouse owner brought out a roll of fresh-cut sod and I made ready to pay him. "No, Mrs. Oswald," he said. "I am a sympathizer. I would not accept payment from you. It won't cost you one cent."

My next problem was the "dead" tree. I pruned it. I had no shears, just an ordinary pair of scissors. As I worked, one of the cemetery workers approached me and said, "Mrs. Oswald, that tree is dead. We'll dig it up for you if you like."

"Oh, no," I answered. "Let the tree alone, and let me see what I can do." I felt sure that there was life left in the roots. So I went back every day for a week, morning and evening, to water the tree. It was stifling hot in Texas, but I worked anyway.

And in five days, the "dead" tree, in which the television announcer found so much ironic symbolism, started to bloom! It was just love and care that transformed

OSWALD--5555

COPYRIGHT PNS

this "symbol of shame" into a symbol of beauty.

Some may wonder why I take such an interest in the grave.

First of all, my son is buried there. Regardless of what the world says or thinks, he is still my son. I keep the grave nice, too, because of the many people who come to visit the boy's grave.

I, as a mother, want these people to go back home knowing a mother's love for a son is everlasting.

(10131978)

#####

COPYRIGHT PNS 1978