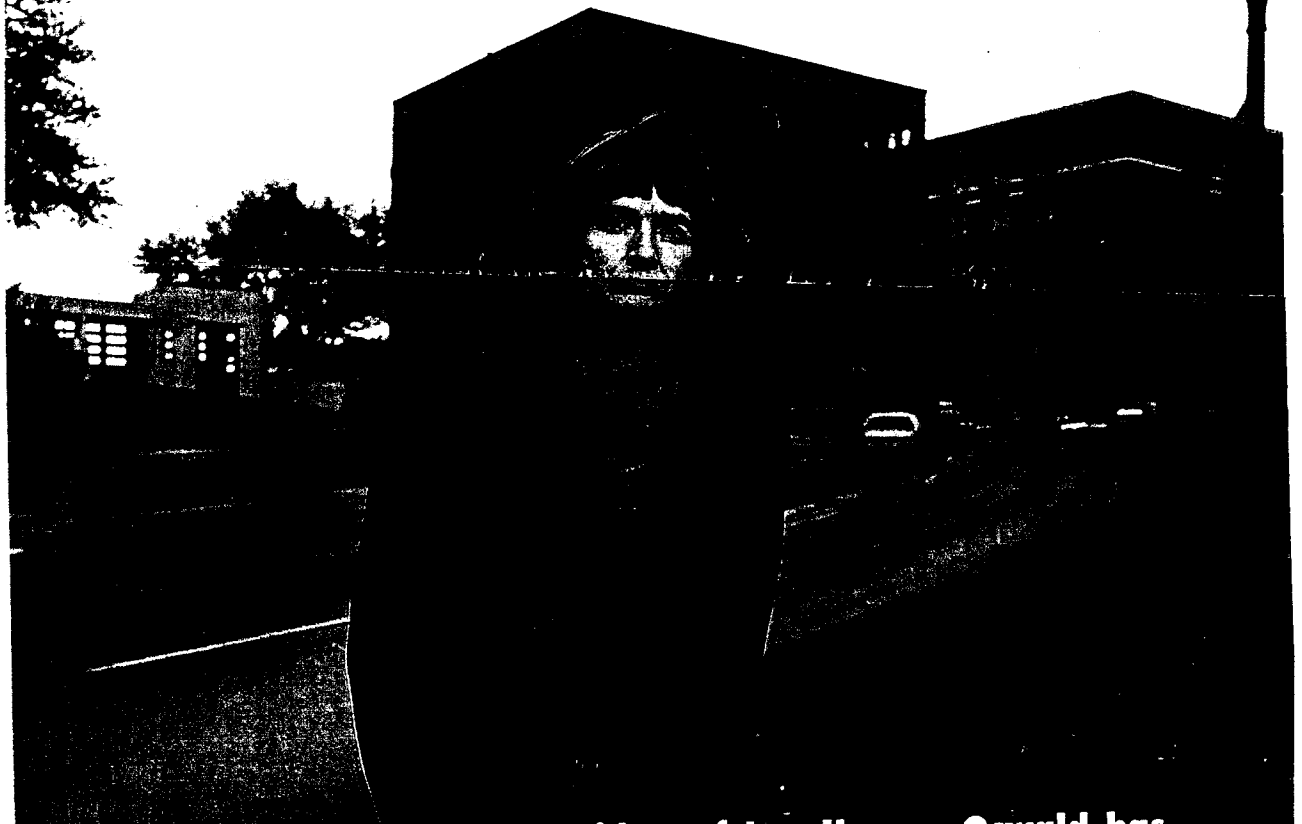
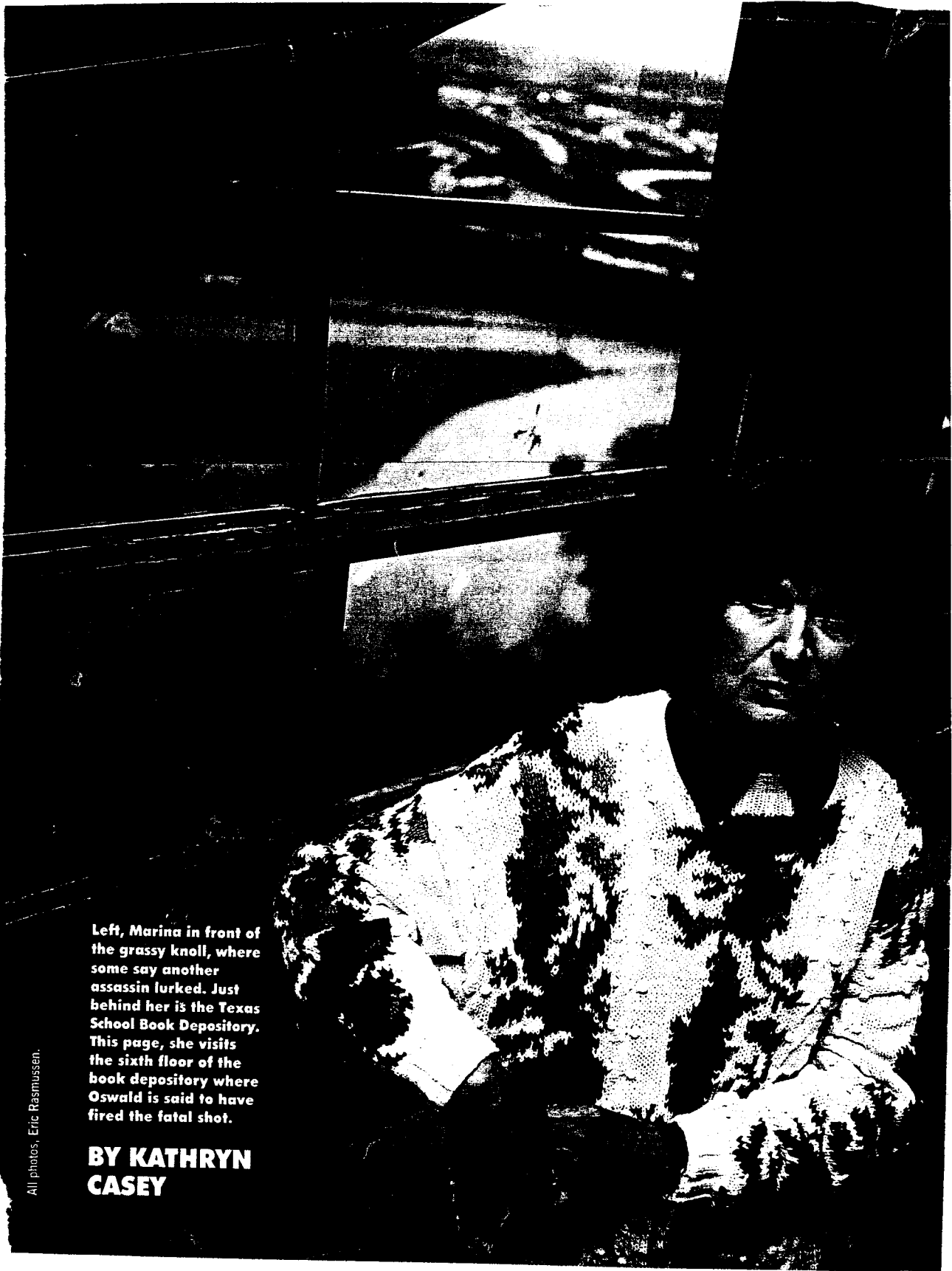


# MARINA'S STORY



**For the first time ever, the widow of Lee Harvey Oswald has come to the places that have haunted her for the past thirty years: the Texas School Book Depository and Dealey Plaza, where President John F. Kennedy was killed on November 22, 1963. "Sooner or later you have to face something; you have to conquer it," she says shakily. "I wanted to come here." (continued)**



Left, Marina in front of the grassy knoll, where some say another assassin lurked. Just behind her is the Texas School Book Depository. This page, she visits the sixth floor of the book depository where Oswald is said to have fired the fatal shot.

All photos, Eric Rasmussen.

**BY KATHRYN CASEY**

(continued) Marina peers nervously out a window on the sixth floor of the book depository—the very bank of windows from which her husband allegedly fired. “I hate to look,” she says, her voice still thick with the accent of her native Russia, as she surveys Dealey Plaza and the path of Kennedy’s motorcade. “If only these walls could talk. It would take a miracle for someone to tell what really happened.”

For many years, Marina, too, kept silent. It wasn’t until 1988, in an exclusive interview with *Ladies’ Home Journal*, that she first spoke publicly about the pain of being a twenty-two-year-old mother, a foreigner in a strange country and the widow of the most infamous man in America. She also revealed that although she once believed that her husband was guilty, she had grown to doubt the Warren Commission findings that branded Oswald the lone gunman.

The article caught the eye of Hollywood producers, and later this year, NBC will air a movie of Marina’s story starring Helena Bonham Carter, of *A Room with a View* and *Howards End*.

### Haunted by the past

Marina met Lee Harvey Oswald, a high school dropout and an ex-Marine who had applied—but been turned down—for Soviet citizenship, in the city of Minsk, where he was working. They were married, and in 1962, Oswald brought his young wife to America. Marina remembers being very much in love with her husband. “Yes, I loved him,” she says. “They ask me, ‘How can you love an assassin?’ I didn’t fall in love with the assassin, I fell in love with the man.” And it was Oswald the man she grieved for when, just two days after Kennedy’s assassination, he was gunned down by Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby.

Although Marina, fifty-four, remarried twenty-seven years ago, raised three children and is the grandmother of five, she admits that day in Dallas never left her. She sometimes has flashbacks, usually of walking in slow motion through a crush of reporters shouting questions in a language she can’t understand. For many years, she accepted the role of widow of the assassin, but it cost her dearly. “I’m all crumbled inside,” she says, explaining how the disgrace ate away at her. “Lee was buried, but I was [buried] even deeper by [the weight of my] humiliation.”

But in 1978, after Congress reopened the investigation into Kennedy’s death, Marina began reevaluating the evidence, studying books and movies on the assassination. “It has been like a heavy object, a hammer in my mind,” she says. Perhaps buoyed by projects like Oliver Stone’s movie *JFK* and the new interest it spawned in a possible conspiracy, Marina now maintains: “Lee never fired a shot. He was a patsy.” Narrowing her haunted blue eyes, she concludes, “It was a political assassination. Very professionally done.”

The fact that her husband was shot only strengthens her belief. “If he were guilty, he’d still be alive,” she says. “There would have been no need to kill him, to shut him up.”

Pointing out of one of the sixth-floor windows at the alleged path of Oswald’s shots, Marina scoffs, “Let intelligent people come and judge for themselves. I’m not an expert, but it’s obvious to me [that it is impossible].”

Though the sixth floor has been open to the public as a museum since 1989, this is Marina’s first visit, and she has been dreading it. Everywhere, images of the past surround her: Jack and Jackie Kennedy on their wedding day; a vibrant Kennedy

taking the oath of office; Jackie, her smart pink suit bloodied, crawling back over the trunk of the presidential limousine; John-John saluting his father’s casket. These reminders both frustrate and obsess her. “I don’t want to live in the past,” Marina says. “I want to live right now, but it’s not in my power.”

As she talks, a black-and-white video plays. In it, Oswald, guarded by police escort, is led down a long hall while reporters shout questions. A narrator says, “In Dallas, Lee Harvey Oswald has been arrested for the assassination of President Kennedy.” Marina stares resolutely out the window. If she hears, she doesn’t react.

### A need to speak

Voicing her beliefs—and opening herself up to criticism—has been difficult for Marina. “You don’t know how many times I talk to myself, ‘Why am I doing this?’” she says, shaking her head. “Sometimes I want to throw in the towel.” It has been painful for her family, too. Marina admits her children (June, thirty-one, and Rachel, twenty-nine, by Oswald, and son Mark, twenty-seven, by her second husband, Kenneth Porter, a carpenter) are not happy with her decision to allow the TV movie to be produced. “I think they want to be left alone,” she says. “It’s their right.”

Despite the pain, Marina says what she wants to do is put things behind and go on with your life, but it’s on television, in the papers. Lee Harvey Oswald—assassin. It just slaps me in the face,” she whispers. “I have the opportunity to put on record my beliefs . . . that is the best I can do.”

Understandably, Marina’s relationship with America, her adopted country, has been uncomfortable. “For many years, I felt I loved this country; this country did not love me,” she says. Although she’s lived in the U.S. for nearly thirty-two years, she became a citizen only

three years ago, when she wanted to travel as an American while accompanying filmmakers who were shooting part of her story in Russia.

Her pilgrimage to her native country was an emotional experience. She says she felt like a stranger in her homeland. “When I flew back to Dallas, I knew I belonged here,” she says. “I love America with all my heart.”

In Dallas, Marina is still something of a curiosity. From the beginning she was approached by strangers eager to voice their opinions. For years she’d draw away, afraid of what they might say. These days, they often share her view that there is much Americans still don’t know about who killed JFK and why. “One woman came up to me and said, ‘Honey, your husband didn’t do it,’” Marina says, smiling. “I wanted to run after her, to ask, ‘What do you know? On what grounds do you base that?’”

Unless someone is able to prove to her satisfaction that Oswald fired the shot that killed Kennedy, Marina says she’ll continue to believe her husband’s story is a historic miscarriage of justice. “I would like in my lifetime that the name Lee Harvey Oswald not be something ugly and dirty,” she says.

And if she’s wrong about her husband’s innocence? “Even if Lee is guilty, I’m not responsible,” she says with newfound understanding. “I’m not going to live with guilt for the rest of my life. I am entitled to life. I want to have hope.”

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