

MARINA OSWALD

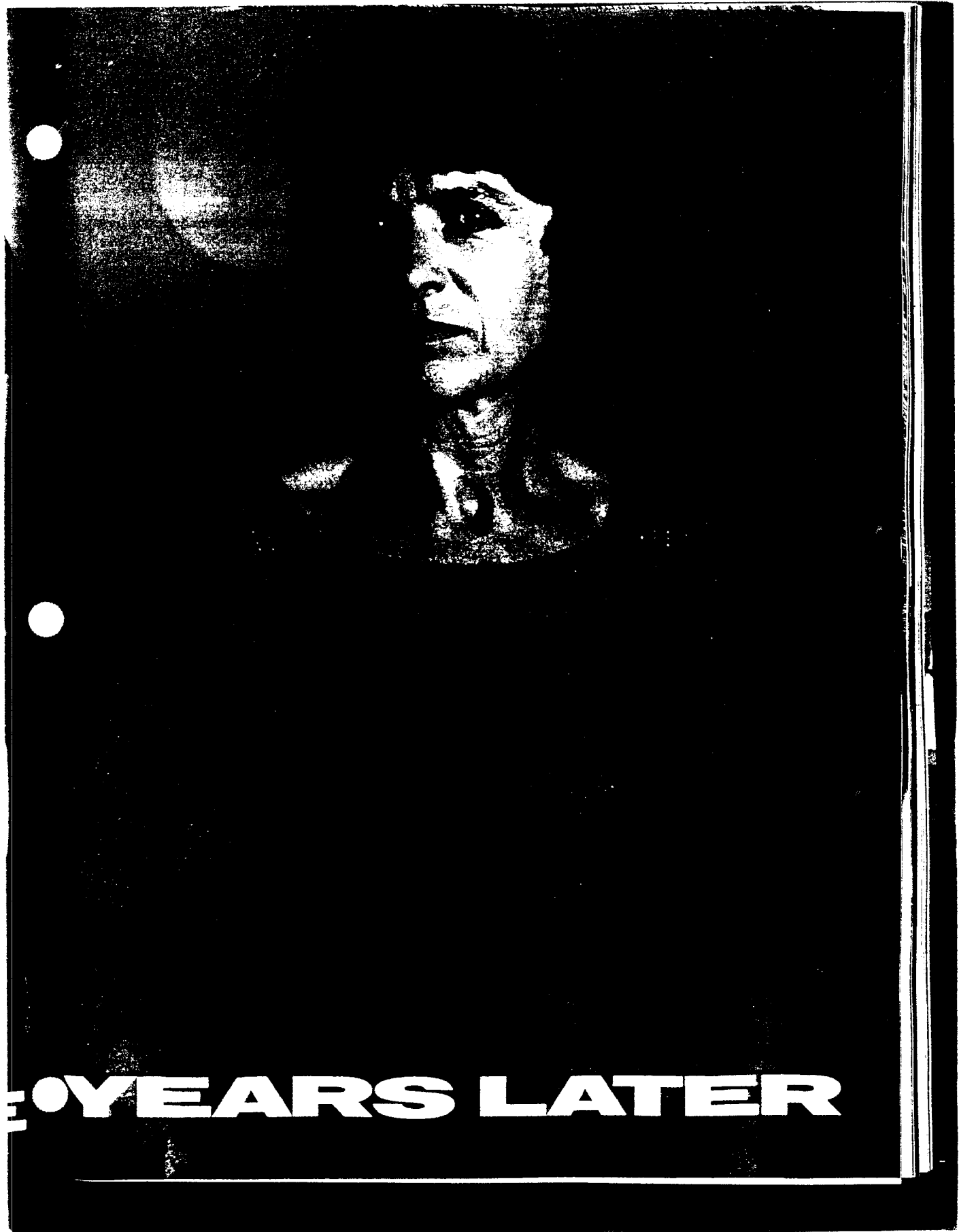
AS THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF JOHN F. Kennedy's assassination approached, *Ladies' Home Journal* Editor-in-Chief Myrna Blyth and Senior Editor Jane Farrell went to Dallas to speak with the widow of Lee Harvey Oswald, the president's accused killer. Here, Marina Oswald talks about the day that changed our nation's history, and she tells what she now believes to be the truth about the assassination

I have lived with the guilt for so long," Marina Oswald Porter says intently. "For years I wondered if I could have done something to avoid what happened in 1963. In my dreams, I was always begging Jackie Kennedy's forgiveness. I accepted my role as the wife of the assassin; I thought there was nothing I could do except make the best of it."

But in recent years, the role of assassin's wife is one that Marina Oswald Porter has, finally, come to reject. After closely examining her memory and piecing together bits of information learned over time, she has reached three startling conclusions: that there was a conspiracy to kill John F. Kennedy; that Oswald was not—as the Warren *(continued)*

By
Myrna Blyth
and
Jane Farrell

TWENTY-FIVE



10 YEARS LATER

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(continued) Commission said—the lone gunman who killed the president with a rifle fired from the Texas School Book Depository; and that the killing of Oswald by Jack Ruby was part of a cover-up.

"I believe there was a conspiracy, that more than one person was involved," Marina says firmly. "I do not necessarily believe that the bullet that came from the depository shot President Kennedy. I don't know if Lee shot him. I'm not saying that Lee is innocent, that he didn't know about the conspiracy or was not part of it, but I am saying that he's not necessarily guilty of murder.

"It was a very complicated plot, brilliantly executed. Could any intelligent person believe that that kind of thing was organized by one man?"

"When Lee was arrested, I remember he said, 'I'm a patsy,'" she continues, drawing on one of the innumerable cigarettes she smokes throughout the day as she sits in her cool, dark living room in suburban Dallas. "I strongly believe that with all the evidence that has come to light, he probably was telling the truth. I know I once testified that I looked in his eyes and I saw he was guilty. It seems very different now. I think back, and I realize that the look in his eyes was scared.

"I think he was caught between two powers—the government and organized crime. Someone may have wanted Kennedy killed, but who was supposed to do what, I do not know."

Marina has never before publicly voiced her new beliefs, and she is frightened about being so outspoken. "What if they're going to shoot me tomorrow? But I have to take a chance." She points to her heart. "I am telling you what I really believe inside.

"I don't think that all this was about John F. Kennedy. It was more about Robert, who was going after organized crime, and who would not be attorney general anymore if his brother was killed. Or maybe John Kennedy's father told some people, 'You elect my son, and I'll do you a favor.' And then the president puts his brother in office, and they start cleaning house. And that was against somebody's wish.

"And at first I thought that Jack Ruby was swayed by passion; all America was grieving. But later we found that he had connections with the underworld. Now I think Lee was killed to keep his mouth shut."

Leaning back in a chair, Marina, drinking endless cups of black coffee, talks softly about the day twenty-five years ago when the police came to her door and told her that her husband had been arrested for the crime of the century. Her voice is still strongly tinged



The lone assassin? Lee Harvey Oswald, with the rifle that investigators said was used to kill John F. Kennedy. Grief and fear: Marina—shown at Oswald's funeral—was afraid she and her children would be shot, too

with the accent of her native Russia, but Marina—forty-seven, trim, self-assured, with extraordinary blue eyes that are peaceful but piercing in their intensity—is very different from the terrified young wife and mother of 1963. Back then, she was twenty-two and had come to the United States from the Soviet Union only seventeen months before. She had met Oswald, an ex-Marine who had tried to become a Soviet citizen, in Minsk, where he was working. He had married her and brought her to Texas. Marina could not speak English, and she understood very little about America.

On November 22, 1963, while she cared for her daughters, June, twenty-one months, and Rachel, an infant of four weeks, Marina watched television reports of President Kennedy's arrival in Dallas. At the time, Oswald and Marina were living apart, he in a boarding house in Dallas near where he worked, and she in a suburban home. Suddenly, Marina recalls her landlady told her that the president had been shot. "I was crying and praying that God would spare his life," she remembers, "because he is a father." She also remembers

worrying, when she heard that the shooting had occurred outside the building where Oswald worked, that her husband, who had made threats against politicians in the past, was somehow involved.

"As soon as I saw the police, I knew why they had come," she recalls. "The thought crossed my mind, I hope it's not Lee." But her worst fears had come true. Marina, who was raised under the Stalinist regime, believed that she as well as Oswald would be put in jail. On the night of the assassination, she recalls, "I dreamed he was executed in the electric chair. It was terrifying."

In fact, she was so frightened by the prospect of Oswald being tried and executed that, she reluctantly acknowledges now, she was relieved when Ruby, a nightclub owner, shot Oswald two days after the assassination. "I'm ashamed to admit it, but I knew it would be better that way, that it was over with."

At that time Marina feared, too, for her own life, as well as that of her two daughters. "When I had to go to Parkland Hospital to identify Lee's body and was walking up the steps, every step was like a mile," she says. "I nearly fainted, I was so afraid. I thought we would be shot, too."

Within months of the assassination, Marina was called to testify before the Warren Commission, a governmental panel appointed to investigate the killing. The defendant's widow became the prosecution's star witness, as she testified that Oswald had (continued)

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(continued) told her he fired a shot at a right-wing leader, former Army Maj. Gen. Edwin Walker, in April 1963.

The portrait Marina painted of Oswald was that of a secretive man who needlessly led a double life, spouted socialist political theories and physically abused her. Her testimony helped the commission in reaching its conclusion that Oswald was a deranged killer who acted alone, and that Oswald's own killing was not tied to any conspiracy.

Now, Marina says, she believes the commission led her to give testimony that would cast her husband in an unfavorable light. "I didn't realize how they led me. I didn't know you aren't supposed to lead a witness. I think the Warren Commission used me as a spokesman to advance their theory of a single gunman, because it comes out stronger; after all, the wife knows." She pauses and adds, "There was only a prosecution, no defense, and I buried him. I was introduced as a witness, and I became his executioner.

"For years," she says, "I didn't think about him; I just felt guilty. For years, I blamed myself. I wondered if I could have changed things if our relationship had been better. I didn't think about the assassination, I didn't read about the conspiracy theories—I didn't even read the Warren Commission report."

But in the past several years, Marina has begun to think again about the man to whom she had been married, and the crime he was accused of committing. And today she says she has a more mature and insightful view of Oswald's conduct, and his part in the Kennedy assassination. What does Marina Oswald Porter think is the untold story of that day in Dallas?

■ Marina now believes that Oswald was a government agent, at least for a time. "Now, looking back at his character, I can see that he had certain traits of professional training, like being secretive, and I believe he worked for the American government. And he was taught the Russian language when he was in the military. Do you think that is usual, that an ordinary soldier is taught Russian? Also, he got in and out of Russia quite easily, and he got me out quite easily. How did this happen?"

She also wonders if Oswald had rational reasons for actions that seemed inexplicable at the time. On the night before the assassination, the Oswalds argued because Marina had discovered that her husband was living under an assumed name in the boardinghouse in Dallas. Today, Marina wonders if he had other reasons for his secretiveness. "Perhaps he told me so little because he was trying to protect me." She also remembers thinking that Oswald was trying to send



Now Marina lives a peaceful suburban life outside Dallas with her second husband, Kenneth Porter. But she is still haunted by the tragic events of twenty-five years ago

her back to the Soviet Union because their marriage was not working out. "Now, I see it differently," she says. "Maybe my living in Russia with the children would have given him an excuse to go back and forth easily between the two countries."

■ Marina points out, too, that Oswald admired and liked Kennedy. "Lee said he was good for the country," she recalls.

■ Marina also believes that George de Mohrenschildt, a friend of the Oswalds' who occasionally visited their home, may have been part of the conspiracy. De Mohrenschildt, an aristocratic Russian exile who loved to talk politics with Oswald, killed himself in 1977 after saying that there was such a conspiracy. "His association with us, his befriending Lee, was very questionable," Marina says. "We were poor people. Why us? Was George de Mohrenschildt what he seemed? Maybe he was going between Lee and somebody else. Maybe he's the one

who told my husband what to do."

■ In the months preceding the assassination, it has been reported that a man, behaving erratically, tried to pass himself off as Oswald in several public places in the Dallas area. The object? Possibly to establish the identity of an unbalanced man so that the real Oswald could be set up later as the president's assassin. "There was another Oswald, and that's no joke," Marina says. "I learned afterward that someone who said he was Lee had been going around looking to buy a car, having a drink in a bar. I'm telling you, Lee did not drink, and he didn't know how to drive. And afterward the FBI took me to a store in Fort Worth where Lee was supposed to have gone to buy a gun. Someone even described me and said I was with him. This woman was wearing a maternity outfit like one I had. But I had never been there."

■ Oswald's cruelty, and his occasional displays of agitated emotion, may have been due to the pressure of his double life. "In his behavior, he was capable of acting like a wild dog," Marina admits. "But he was a very loving father, and he loved me. How can one person have such contradictions? Maybe a psychiatrist would call it schizophrenic, but it could be the pressure he was living with as well. One time, when we were living in New Orleans, he broke down and cried. He seemed to have such a heavy burden that he wanted to share with me but couldn't."

Marina also wonders if there were people who did know more about Oswald's life, and the assassination, than they revealed. One, she suspects, who knew more than he told is the late FBI (continued on page 236)

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Has it been ages since your dog had a meaty, teeth-cleaning bone?



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director, J. Edgar Hoover. "It's a proven fact that the man did not reveal all he knew about the assassination, that certain things had been covered up. Why?" The FBI was also eager to find out what, if anything, Marina herself knew. FBI agents who visited her implied that if she did not tell all she knew about the assassination, and her life in Russia, she might have problems staying in the United States.

"When I went to Washington to testify before the Warren Commission," she continues, "seven or more men met me; apparently they were all FBI. But when I shook hands with Mr. Hoover, who was with them, I was chilled from top to bottom. It was as if you met a dead person; he had a coldness like someone from the grave."

Marina, who says that Hoover kept her under surveillance for years, adds caustically, "J. Edgar Hoover knew everything. He knew when I was getting my next period, and when to send me my next boyfriend." In the year following the assassination, in reaction to her ordeal, Marina went through a period of going to a singles club, casual dating and having a few drinks on her nights out. During that time, she feels, some of the men with whom she had a relationship were FBI agents, and that she was watched closely so that if she ever changed her testimony about Oswald, the government would be able to discredit her.

But her marriage in 1965, to Dallas carpenter Kenneth Porter, brought a greater stability to Marina's life. The couple moved to a Dallas suburb, and within a year, she gave birth to Mark, her third child. However, because of continuing stress, Marina and her second husband had difficult times; they quarreled frequently and in 1974, the two were divorced. However, they eventually worked out

their differences, and they have lived together for the past several years, though they have not remarried.

It is obvious that Marina and the tall, soft-spoken Porter do care deeply for each other, and they are close to their children; Porter says Oswald's two daughters "think of me as their father." June, twenty-six, is a vice president in a Dallas construction company, and Rachel, twenty-five, who bears a strong resemblance to Oswald, is a student at a nearby university. Marina and her daughters have never talked much about the assassination, and when asked what effect it has had on the girls, she says briefly, "You'll have to ask them." But she adds, "Ken has done a good job raising them." The Porters' youngest child, Mark, twenty-two, the only one of her children who is married, works in a local garage. And this fall, Marina will become a grandmother.

Today, she spends most of her time taking care of her comfortable, roomy home, tending to her beloved plants, and looking after the family dogs, Pal and Charlie. "I have a nice life," she says. "I love my life, and that Ken takes care of me. All I ever wanted was to be a wife and mother."

But the assassination is never far from her mind, and she spends hours thinking about its inconsistencies, as well as the man who is at the center of the puzzle.

"I loved him, and I grieved when he died," she says, almost defiantly. "There's always a question asked of me: 'Did you love the man?' Yes, I loved him. 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.

"But I would not portray him as a saint," she adds quietly. "No way. But there was a good side to him. He knew quite a lot about literature and music; he loved Peer Gynt. We shared certain things."

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she speaks again. "Whenever Lee was hurt, I felt physical pain for him. With Kenneth, I don't feel that way. But I feel very comfortable. It's a different kind of love . . . When you're young you are more passionate.

"After it happened," she continues, speaking slowly, "I had a very peculiar dream. There was a mob, and it was very dark, but there was a light from above. The mob was after Lee, and I felt that I had to protect him. And there was a ladder; you couldn't see the end of it. I felt so good that he went up it and was safe. They couldn't touch him."

Marina acknowledges that that same protectiveness may be at the root of her need to find a new explanation for the assassination, and that she may be too willing to grasp at straws. "I have to be very, very objective, because I want him to be innocent."

But at the same time, she says, she does not want another probe like the Warren Commission. "The dignitaries, those nice men in three-piece suits," she says, for the first time showing a trace of bitterness. "They never do anything wrong; I don't believe that anymore. I don't believe the government always tells people the truth. Maybe someday, though, the government will come to me and tell me the truth and say, 'I'm sorry, Mrs. Porter.'" Marina hopes, too, that the truth will be found by scholars when the Warren Commission materials are declassified.

Perhaps because she does not trust any government, Marina has never become an American citizen. But she is quick to say, "I do feel that I'm a good citizen. I love the American people. My neighbors and friends have been wonderful to me. Without them, I could not have survived after the assassination."

And any cynicism dissipates as soon as Marina is asked about John F. Kennedy. When she speaks of the slain president, his widow, and his family, it is apparent how much pain their suffering has caused her.

"I only want the Kennedys to have good health," she says. "No matter how rich or how poor you are, two women still feel the same way underneath. Jackie has her heartache, just as I have mine. I wish her well. When Caroline had her baby, I was tickled pink. I was hoping for a healthy baby, and I'm glad she had one."

She pauses and adds awkwardly, "I'll go to the grave believing that Lee adored John Kennedy. How do you think I learned to like John Kennedy?"

It is such inconsistencies that make Marina almost desperately eager to learn the whole truth about the assassination. As she stands in her neat kitchen, talking intently, it is clear she is still, after all these years, preoccupied with the event that changed a nation's history and permanently transformed her life.

"You know how the bark grows strong around the tree, but inside it's still very tender?" she asks, her voice becoming softer. "I'm broken inside, let's put it that way."

"When I was questioned by the Warren Commission, I was a blind kitten. Their questioning left me only one way to go: guilty. I made Lee guilty. He never had a fair chance. I have that on my conscience. I buried all his chances by my statements. I drowned him."

"But I was only twenty-two then, and I've matured since; I think differently," she says.

"Look, I'm walking through the woods, trying to find a path, just like all of us. The only difference is, I have a little bit of insight. Only half the truth has been told. I want to find out the whole truth. It may be a bitter truth at the end for me. But I want the truth. In America, in this wonderful country, you should get the truth." ■

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