

Marina OSWALD

talks

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That terrible 'November'

By Jack Harrison Pollack

ON NOV. 22, 1963, Marina and Lee Oswald were living apart. Marina and her two young daughters were in Irving, Tex., near Dallas, at the home of Ruth Hyde Paine, a kindly Quaker pacifist with two young children, who was separated from her husband Michael. Ruth Paine had met the Oswalds at a Dallas party in February 1963. Ruth and Marina had quickly become friends, and partly because Ruth wanted to improve her Russian, which she hoped to teach, and partly out of pity, she invited Marina to move in with her.

That November day the two women stood before the television set as Ruth translated the staccato bulletins about the assassination. Marina learned that the shots that killed the president had come from the Texas School Book Depository building, where Oswald had been working for the preceding five weeks. "I felt a click in my heart," Marina recalls. She knew that seven months earlier her husband had taken a shot at right-wing Gen. Edwin Walker. "I knew Lee was capable of committing this crime."

While Ruth was glued to the TV screen, Marina ran out to the garage, where she had recalled that her husband's rifle was concealed under a heavy wool blanket. She did not unroll it because it was bulky, tied in string, and in its usual place. It appeared to her that the rifle was still there underneath it. "I said to myself," she remembers, "Thank God it was a different nut who did this terrible thing."

Guns were one of her husband's great passions. He used to go to practice some evenings on rifle range. When we went into department store, he looked at guns while I looked at dresses and toys. If I had tried to get rid of his rifle, he might have gotten rid of me."

At about 3 p.m. six Dallas police officers arrived. Does your husband own a rifle?" demanded one. Marina nodded. She led them to the garage and pointed at the rolled-up blanket. A policeman lifted the blanket. It hung limply over his arms. "My heart turned to stone," recalls Marina. "I knew then that it was Lee. It was not until much later that I began to understand the

chain of events that led to this terrible thing."

At the end of that day, after her husband had been arrested, Marina returned from police headquarters. She glanced at her grandmother's antique blue-green cup, which sat on her bedroom dresser. The police had overlooked it. Inside lay her husband's wedding ring. Although Oswald had never before removed it, even on his most menial jobs, he had done so the night before the assassination during an overnight trip from Dallas to visit Marina and the children at the Paine home. Perhaps he never expected to wear it again. He also left \$170 inside the dresser.

Was he unconsciously begging her to prevent him from slaying the president? Marina replied sadly, "I realized later that is why he came to stay overnight. He left early in the morning and told me not to bother making breakfast for him. The next day I spoke to Lee in Dallas jail by telephone through glass partition. It was last time I saw him. I saw fear and guilt in his eyes even though he tried to cover up with — is that right word? — bravado."

To this day, Marina is not absolutely certain why her husband wanted to kill JFK. "Lee always admired President Kennedy as I did," she muses. "How could anybody in his right mind kill somebody he admired? Lee never once mentioned to me that he wanted to kill John Kennedy as he did Gen. Walker and Nixon. He was very happy that Kennedy was elected over Nixon. We were married a few months after Kennedy became president. In Russia Lee even used to brag what a good leader Kennedy was. Once when he was listening to one of President Kennedy's speeches over short-wave radio, I asked him what was being said. He told me to



Lee Harvey Oswald in Russia with his wife Marina and their daughter June

shut up and not to interrupt. His attitude was: 'You're just a woman. What do you know about politics?' Lee even said to me — it's crazy of course — that he wanted to be president himself in 20 years when he was 43 like Kennedy, or have a son who would be president. That's why he wanted a son born in the United States. But we never had a son. We had two girls, June and Rachel."

She suggested that her husband, a high school dropout, may have been jealous not only of the Harvard-educated JFK's intellect, but even of his good looks. "I used to tease Lee that John Kennedy was sexually attractive to me. Before Lee, I had boyfriend named Anatoly, who looked something like John Kennedy with that same open face. Later, when Lee and I were married and had fight, I made him angry by saying that Anatoly used to kiss better than he did. One New Year's Eve — it was 1963 — Lee went to sleep at 10 o'clock. When midnight come, I wrote Anatoly letter saying that my husband didn't love me and I wished that we could be together again in Russia. Letter came back because I didn't put enough stamps on it. Lee saw this letter and read it. He was oh, so mad at me and said that he'd never trust me again."

Marina still harbors feelings of guilt about "November," as she calls the assassination. The thought that she might have prevented it still nags her, and she wonders if history might have been different had she reported to the police her husband's attempt to kill Gen. Walker in April 1963. "At about 10 o'clock one night," she remembered, "I found on Lee's desk a note Lee wrote in Russian telling me what to do if he was arrested. He also left some money and keys to mailbox. Later that night he came home very late, scared and

pale. He told me that Gen. Walker was fascist and that if somebody had killed Hitler early enough many lives would have been saved. I knew then what had happened. I said: 'Lee, even if you don't like man's politics, that's no reason to shoot him.' I was very relieved when we heard over television that bullet had missed. I didn't go to police because I was afraid of them. I didn't speak English and I knew that I didn't have anybody else in country besides Lee. If I lost him, what would I do? I couldn't tattletale on my own husband and end up alone. I didn't know American law. I remembered in Russia if close relative commits crime, you can be as guilty as he is. If your husband does something wrong, you feel also responsible. even though you had nothing to do with it. Don't you agree? I know that I should have gone to police. It was very selfish of me and I feel guilty I did nothing."

Eleven days later — Sunday, April 21, 1963 — Marina did act decisively. Oswald thought he had read that former Vice President Richard Nixon, whom he hated, was coming to Dallas that day. As he was dressing he reached for his pistol. "I'm going out to have a look," he told his wife. Alarmed, Marina went into the bathroom and called Lee in. When he entered she edged herself out and shut the door. It couldn't be locked from the outside, so she gripped the knob, clamping her feet against the door.

"You'll leave here over my dead body!" she remembers screaming in Russian. "You promised me you'd never shoot anybody else. Here I am pregnant

again and you don't even care if I lose our baby!"

Meekly, Oswald came out, handed her his gun, and mumbled, "OK, I won't do it." Marina recalls that she was sobbing as she opened the door. Later, she hid the gun under the mattress without looking to see whether it was loaded. As it turned out, it was not Nixon but Vice President Lyndon Johnson who was coming to Dallas, but not for two more days. "Maybe he was testing, or sending me message with that awful scare," Marina sorrowfully reflected. "He was become sick in head and needed help. But I was too young and dumb to know about mental illness. I didn't know what to do. If I did, maybe I could have stopped him from that terrible thing."

Marina also feels guilty for not telling Ruth Paine about the rifle Oswald kept in the Paine garage, or about the Walker and "Nixon" episodes. Had Marina done so, Ruth has said, she would have gone to the police and tried to get psychiatric help for Oswald. She is ashamed of her shabby behavior toward Ruth Paine, who gave her and her children shelter and financial support — and whom she has not seen since the assassination period. Marina also regrets that she never reciprocated the kindness, hospitality and money given her and Lee by the Dallas Russian colony. Like her husband, she frequently turned her back on her American and Dallas Russian colony benefactors when they were no longer useful to her. "I now realize that I used people because I did not know how to stand on my own two feet," she said.

TOMORROW: Born loser.

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