

# Marina OSWALD talks

## Lying to the commission

By Jack Harrison Pollack

**A**FTER BEING RELEASED from protective governmental custody, Marina Oswald considered moving in with her mother-in-law, Marguerite, but her late husband's brother Robert talked her out of the idea. Instead, she moved into the home of James Martin, the manager of the Inn of the Six Flags, and his wife and children. For a time he was her business manager. But after a short time, their arrangement broke up. She moved in with Robert for a short time before renting, then buying — with the money people had sent her and additional funds from interviews — a five-room ranch house for \$22,000 in the Dallas suburb of Richardson.

The Russian-born widow of the man who had killed the president of the United States felt loathsome. Her negative self-image wasn't helped by ghoulish would-be hucksters who vulgarly propositioned her to tour America and Europe with her husband's dead body — for a lucrative admission fee.

In 1964, Marina entered a willfully intemperate, self-destructive period of which she is now thoroughly ashamed. The public portrait of her that then emerged was that of a venal, lazy, cold, self-centered, shallow opportunist and neglectful mother who had maneuvered to emigrate to America through marriage to a crazy Communist and was now callously exploiting American good will. She discarded the hand-me-down clothes which members of the Russian community had given her, and purchased a new wardrobe at Nieman-Marcus. She had major dental work done, free, at the Baylor Clinic. She joined a members-only Dallas nightclub called The Music Box. She bowled and danced all night, drinking enormous quantities of Kahlua, a liqueur she still favors, and flitted through a series of indiscreet sexual adventures. Many men who regarded her as an easy mark had a perverse desire to bed down with the widow of the president's assassin. She received hundreds of marriage "proposals" by mail.

Despite the barrier her inadequate English presented, she negotiated contracts with a skill that many Hollywood agents would envy. If she had ever been as frightened and as hapless as she publicly seemed, her post-assassination trials were beginning to

change her.

For example, a journalist recalls he had to pay her a fee of \$1,500 for a routine interview conducted through an interpreter. Whenever his questions veered away from the agreed-upon subjects of her children and the contents of the letters she had received from Americans, she would snap in English: "Not in contract!" Life magazine paid her \$20,000 for the leaked "rights" to her late husband's diary. And her lawyers sued the U.S. government for seizing Oswald's rifle and other items that are now in the National Archives. Though awarded a reported \$17,729, she never received any money.

Book publishers, magazine editors, motion picture and television producers in both American and Europe

besieged her with other contract offers. But she kept most of them at bay. She even refused to be interviewed by William Manchester, the official Kennedy family biographer, who was then working on "Death of a President."

In 1964, she quietly signed a contract with Harper & Row to cooperate on a third-person book, "Marina and Lee," which was then in its early stages of research by its author, Priscilla Johnson McMillan, who later translated the memoirs of Stalin's daughter Svetlana Peterson. McMillan, who speaks Russian fluently and is now an associate at the Russian Research Center at Harvard, had worked for John Kennedy as a foreign-policy researcher in the 1950s while he was still a U.S. senator. She had also, from 1958 to 1960, been a newspaper correspondent in Moscow for a news and feature service, and had interviewed Oswald there about his defection to the Soviet Union. When Marina agreed to cooperate on the book, McMillan moved in with her for seven months in Texas and Arizona seclusion. "Marina and Lee" came out in November 1977. She received a \$10,000 advance and thus far has received more than \$60,000 in royalties for her cooperation.

"For a long time, I hated myself," Marina said.

"I felt like nothing before Priscilla made me feel like something." McMillan adds: "Marina loyally stuck by me, never put any pressure on me and even waived her right of manuscript approval. She preferred that Lee's name not be in the title, but she honestly wanted a book written for history to try to help make up for what Lee did."

Marina never read any assassination books and



**Marina Oswald and Earl Warren, head of the commission investigating the JFK assassination, in 1964**

## Fourth of five articles

Marina an appealing, confused young woman. Asked whether her husband had a shotgun or rifle when residing in the Soviet Union, she answered, "I don't know difference . . . You men — that's your business" Warren — a lifelong California hunting enthusiast himself — conceded, "My wife wouldn't know the difference, either. So that's all right."

But an amorous escapade of Marina's during her four-day February testimony upset the straight-laced Warren. Late one evening, a male admirer slipped into Marina's Washington hotel room and remained all night. A Secret Service man banged on the door, but it was not opened. Warren angrily rebuked the Secret Service for not protecting her better. But Marina defended the agents, saying, "It was done after hours and when they went off duty."

In her final testimony shortly before the Warren Report was released in September 1964, she confused the commission further by testifying that her husband had wanted to kill Texas Gov. John Connally — not President Kennedy. Some speculated that Marina herself might be a Soviet spy.

Later, Warren privately admitted that he was concerned that Oswald's widow not collapse while testifying. However, another commissioner, Georgia Sen. Richard B. Russell, was particularly irritated at how she had changed her mind during her testimony. "A baffling personality," he called her. Marina claimed that she was "confused" because of the language barrier.

But commission lawyer Norman Redlich, now New York University's law dean, afterwards wrote a heated memorandum charging that she had "lied to the Secret Service, the FBI and this commission repeatedly on matters which are of vital concern to the people of this country and the world." For example, Marina had denied to FBI agents on Nov. 29, 1963, and Jan. 22, 1964, that her husband had made an eight-day trip to Mexico on Sept. 25 — seven weeks before the assassination. But later, on Feb. 3, 1964, before the Warren Commission, she admitted that he had. Similarly, several days after the JFK assassination, Marina had denied to the FBI any knowledge about the photographs of her husband holding a rifle, which both Oswald in jail and some conspiracy theorists ever since have branded as "fakes." Actually, Marina later acknowledged that her husband had ordered her to take them with his camera for possible publication in left-wing magazines.

When I asked Marina why she had lied, she explained, "I was afraid I would be punished for knowing those things."

**TOMORROW: Unhappy in Russia, Ambivalent in America.**

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articles. "From what I had heard about them, most were just a bunch of lies." Did she watch any of the TV docu-dramas about her husband? "I tried to, but fell asleep during them," she said.

In June 1964, the Dallas Morning News reprinted excerpts from her husband's diary, written in English when he was in Russia. Marina knew about this, but could never read it. Oswald confessed that he had been in love with Ella Germann, an intelligent brunet Jewish woman who had rejected his marriage proposal. To spite Ella, he had married Marina. "If I had only known that before I never would have married him," his widow said.

Oswald's widow likewise now has second thoughts about her long Warren Commission testimony in 1964 through an interpreter. Then-Rep. Gerald R. Ford, one of the commissioners, says that she was "the most difficult" of the 552 witnesses. The commission was accused of treating the 22-year-old Russian woman too gently.

Marina only vaguely remembers the seven commissioners and 14 staff lawyers, other than Chairman Earl Warren and Ford. "Chief Justice Warren was not just gentleman but a very gentle man. He encouraged me to feel *kak doma*, which means 'at home' in Russian. Like all real great persons, he made you feel comfortable and made you remember what you might forget."

When requested to identify her husband's garments, Marina broke down. Warren comforted her until she regained her self-control. A father of three grown daughters himself, the chief justice found