

Marina

OSWALD

talks

From widow to housewife

By Jack Harrison Pollack

MARINA PRUSAKOVA was born prematurely on July 17, 1941, in the small White Sea village of Moloforsk (now Severodvinsk), in the northwestern Arctic Ocean region of the U.S.S.R. At birth, she weighed barely two pounds. "I was so



The house in Richardson, Texas, where Marina lives with Ken Porter and her three children

skinny they called me 'Toothpick.' " she said. The future Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald was the illegitimate daughter of a 23-year-old laboratory worker, Klavdia, and a Russian soldier whose regiment had passed through the town, whose name she does not know. Marina survived thanks largely to her stern but loving grandmother, in whose crowded apartment Marina lived until she was 6.

When she was 15, her mother died of cancer. After her mother's death, her stepfather refused to give her

any food or money. Whenever she came home late, he locked her out, forcing her to sleep in the stairway. Finally, he ordered her: "Get out! I am not your relative. You're not my child." Marina, who then secured a small orphan's pension of 16 rubles a month, became a child of the streets.

When Marina had just turned 18 in 1959, she moved to Minsk. There, she was reluctantly taken in by her Aunt Valya and her uncle Ilya Prusakova, her mother's eldest brother, a communist bureaucrat who directed prison workers in the timber industry of the Byelorussian Republic. At Ilya's urging, Marina joined the Communist League of Youth. She denied this membership two years later, when applying for a United States visa. At a March 1961 dance in Minsk at

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Marina Oswald, housewife

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savagery to tenderness. But Marina admits that she frequently provoked him. "When he was angry with me, he slapped me across face and beat me with his fists — like when I called him weak and cowardly and not real man," she recalls. Once he beat her for letting his mother into the house to see her grandchild. One day, while Marina was pregnant with their second child, she viewed her bruised face in the mirror, and on a hysterical impulse tried to hang herself with a clothesline cord strung up in the bathroom. Oswald entered in time to restrain her, calmed her tenderly and that night, Marina remembers, they shared the best sex of their marriage.

But the year and a half that the two spent together in the United States mostly consisted of a constant round of separations — during which Oswald would hole up in shabby boarding houses — and reconciliations. Marina remained helpless because she spoke no English. "He never talked about future for us as family," Marina said sadly.

Today Marina lives happily with her second husband, Ken Porter, a tall, athletic man who repairs and sells sewing machines in his small Dallas shop. At the time, Porter was a \$600-a-month electronics technician at the Texas Instruments plant in Richardson. On June 1, 1965, they were married.

They lived together for the next nine years, and had a son, Mark. But in 1974 Marina again felt "unwanted" by her husband, and, with her daughters, moved into a Dallas apartment. She took a job as a salesclerk in a local department store and had a fling with a lawyer. Porter filed for divorce and got custody of Mark and most of their possessions. But Marina says, "I was miserable during our six-months separation. I missed my son and Ken. The day after we got divorced, we realized that we really loved each other and went back living together. I decided not to marry again even though Ken wants to. What if it doesn't work out? We don't need a piece of legal paper. I was just going back to my home, my son, my husband. Sure, we still have

differences. But I have more mature relation with him than with Lee. He is good husband and father. Today I am contented housewife and mother. When I must travel, I cannot wait to get home. I guess I am really country bumpkin."

Friends of the Porters say that Marina is a devoted mother who has raised disciplined, bright children. Her daughters June Lee, 16, and Rachel, 15, now use the name Porter, although Ken has not legally adopted them. When they started school Marina told them who their father was, since they were too young to remember him.

"I told them the truth," says Marina. "I said if other children tease them, because children can be cruel, they should admit it. They did not do anything. It is not their fault. People are only responsible — my girls must learn this — for what they do. The girls want to know things like whether Lee ever played with them or held them in his lap. Neither children or I have visited Lee's grave. June was annoyed at me for saying in public that Lee killed President Kennedy. "There was no trial, mother," she said.

She has never applied for U.S. citizenship, saying only, "I'm too lazy. I do not have time to memorize questions about Constitution and learn who is this senator and who is that one." Priscilla McMillan, however, thinks that Marina may be avoiding the citizenship test because of her deep fear of failure.

Fifteen years after her first husband's death, Marina's feelings about him remain strong and bitter. "After assassination I hated him. Now I am just angry at him. He used me. I once loved him blindly, but I wonder if he loved me. Now I just try to remember good times together in Russia. Of course, I can never forget or forgive what he did to me, my children, President Kennedy and his family, and whole world."

What has been the most difficult part of her life since the assassination period? "To accept," she replies, "fact that you are branded forever."

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