

Oswald's Brother Breaks Silence

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Little Rock, Ark.

Robert Oswald feels for the families of Timothy McVeigh and John Hinckley, because he knows what it's like to have an infamous relative.

In a rare interview in the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Oswald said he believes his kid brother, Lee Harvey Oswald, acted alone in killing President Kennedy, but he still doesn't know why.

After declining interviews for 20 years or so, the 63-year-old Oswald said he decided to talk now partly to help other families that might be trying to cope with wrongs done by their relatives. The interview was published last month.

"My heart just ached when I saw the father and mother of John Hinckley," he said, referring to Ronald Reagan's would-be assassin in 1981. "And you think of what the families of people like Tim McVeigh go through." McVeigh was convicted and sentenced to death for the Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 in April 1995.

Oswald and his family now live in Wichita Falls, Texas, where they have tried to survive without stigma. Oswald said he doesn't talk to his grandchildren about the assassination or their great-uncle, hoping to avoid confusion and concern.

"You can either light a situation or defuse it, and we chose a long time ago to (defuse) it," he said. "Why put all of that on kids?"

There's nothing in Oswald's living room to suggest that Lee Harvey Oswald ever existed, but photos on a bedroom wall indicate his pledge to never forget his kid brother.

Oswald remembers sleeping next to his brother in a New Orleans orphanage, where his mother placed them after their father died.

After leaving the Marines in 1959, Lee told Robert he was thinking of going to Cuba to emulate Ernest Hemingway. Instead, just a week later, he impulsively headed for the Soviet Union, where he defected.

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He came back in 1962, with a new Russian wife, Marina. That fall, a year to the day before Kennedy's assassination, Robert, Lee and their stepbrother, John, gathered at Robert's home in Texas for their first meeting in nine years. Their mother wasn't invited.

A home movie made during the Thanksgiving Day reunion shows Lee Harvey Oswald — in brown pants, white shirt and a gray vest — sitting on the end of a couch in Robert's living room, watching his 6-year-old niece, Cathy, dance.

Marina comes to the armrest alongside. Lee points out the camera to her without ever quite looking at her. He suddenly seems distanced from the frivolity.

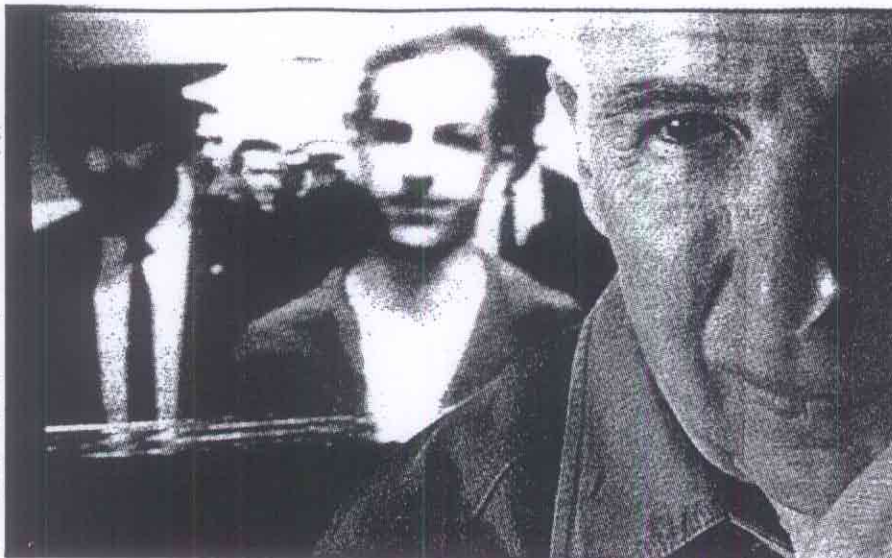
Near the end of the movie, Robert, holding his 2-year-old son, sits down on the floor directly in front of Lee. Robert beams.

"I was feeling good," Robert reflected. "We didn't talk about politics or anything heavyweight that day. Just family stuff. Enjoying each other and the kids."

It was their last family gathering.

In March 1963, Robert, by then living in Arkansas, received a letter from Lee with a Dallas post office box as a return address. Six months later, Robert wrote Lee seeking another reunion but never received an answer.

Robert was working in his of-



Robert Oswald posed in Dallas this fall in front of a television monitor showing his brother, Lee Harvey Oswald, minutes before he was shot by Jack Ruby in 1963

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office on Nov. 22, 1963, when word came of the assassination. He thought he heard the name Oswald. Then he heard Lee Harvey Oswald's name clearly.

"Something must have shown

in my face," he recalls, "because this receptionist took a look at me and started crying."

"That's my kid brother," Robert Oswald said to no one in particular.

In a recurring dream, Robert Oswald comes close to finding an explanation. On his command, Lee Harvey Oswald writes an explanation furiously while his big brother paces. He starts to hand it over, then says, "Just a minute" and takes the paper back.

"He looks at his writing on the paper, then tears it all up and throws it away. And he looks at me and says, 'I don't know why,'" Robert Oswald says. "And I think it will always be that he doesn't know why. I think that's the truth of it."

Robert's daughter Cathy, 40, remains leery of talk about her uncle.

Twenty-six years ago, a high school history teacher asked Cathy whether she was related to Lee Harvey Oswald. Stunned, she could not make her lips move. She picked up her books and started walking hurriedly for the door.

"Cathy Oswald, I better get you out of my class before you assassinate me," the teacher said.

"It knocked the air right out of me," she remembered.