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A little girl in Dallas

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That elusive little girl in Dallas

A young man's search for a clue to the JFK assassination

David Lutz, now a student at Brown University, was three years old when President John F. Kennedy was shot in Dallas. As a 13-year-old at Beverly Hills High School in California, Lutz took up the Kennedy assassination as an extra credit project and became engrossed in his studies. Researching the famous Zapruder film of the assassination over and over, he one day noticed something that no one, apparently, had noticed before: a little girl who stops suddenly, startled, while chasing the presidential limousine. This is the story of his search for that little girl.

By David Lutz

I sat watching the silent Zapruder film for what must have been the 50th time that night. Suddenly, this time, I saw something that startled me: a young girl, running to keep pace with the presidential limousine, stopped abruptly and turned toward the Texas School Book Depository — too early in the film — before any shots were supposed to have been fired.

I turned the film back to make sure that what I thought I had seen was not a product of my own imagination, but there it was again.

Many assassination investigators have said that the killing was a conspiracy — not because of the existence of a second gun, other bullets or witnesses who saw a second assassin, but because the shots were fired too close together, too quickly for that particular gun's mechanism to fire twice.

But if the first shot had been fired earlier than they thought, that would have left enough time for one assassin to have fired all the shots.

I rolled the film again so I could take a closer look at the girl. She was about 10, wore a red skirt and a white top, and was Caucasian.

I knew that there were many possibilities why a 10-year-old might stop running: maybe her parents called her back, she might simply have become tired, but

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just possibly she stopped running in reaction to a rifle shot.

I believed the theory that the President had been the victim of more than one assassin. The most common reason for concluding that Lee Harvey Oswald had not been the sole assassin in the plaza that day was some simple arithmetic applied to the Zapruder film.

I knew from my reading that Oswald's gun could fire only one bullet every 23 seconds. The FBI calculated that 18.2 frames of movie film passed through Zapruder's movie and Howell camera every second. If the Zapruder film revealed a shot striking the car or its occupants more frequently than once every 42 frames (23 seconds multiplied by the camera's 18.2

frames per second) the assassination of the President must have been a conspiracy, since Oswald's gun could not have fired fast enough to do the job alone.

Unfortunately, Abraham Zapruder was not a professional cameraman. When he chose his position to film the parade, he did not realize that the limousine and its crew seats would be obscured from view by a freeway sign. At frame 210, appearing to be unaware, President Kennedy fell from view behind the sign. He emerged from the other side of the sign at frame 223 of the film with both hands to his throat, the effect of a bullet wound.

The Warren Commission felt that it would not be possible to pinpoint the exact time of the first shot due to the interference of the sign. Therefore, it sufficed to say that President Kennedy was shot while he was obscured by the freeway sign.

At frame 238 of the film a shot hit Gov. John Connally. The bullet pierced and collapsed his lung. Like a deflating balloon, the collapse forced the breath which the governor had just drawn back up his windpipe and out his mouth. This motion is seen starting at frame 241 of the film, just after his shoulder is thrust forward

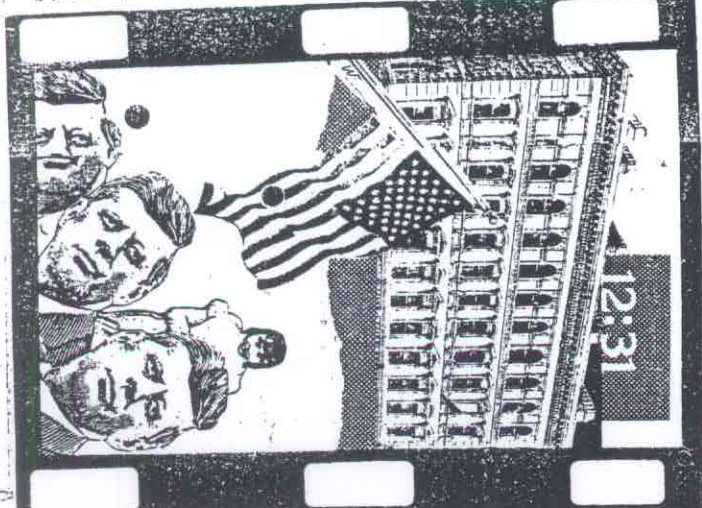
This being the case, I subtracted the frame in which President Kennedy was shot from the frame in which Gov. Connally was hit and found that 26 frames at most elapsed between the two shots (238-210=28). This was not enough time for Oswald's gun to be the sole firing weapon.

If, as shown, Connally was shot at frame 238, then the earlier shot would have to have hit the President not at frame 210, but before frame 196 for a lone assassin using Oswald's gun to have been responsible for both shots (238-42=196).

But the little girl stopped running at frame 197 of the Zapruder film. If she stopped running in reaction to a shot, that would mean that the first shot was fired much earlier than any researcher had assumed.

In the Zapruder film, there are two distinct groups of witnesses — those in the foreground, in front of the presidential limousine, and those behind the limousine. It is nearly impossible to distinguish the reaction of any witness to the sound of gunfire in either group because those standing closer to Zapruder all have their backs to us and those in the background fall into soft blur on the grain of the film. However, there is one witness who can be seen between the groups — the little girl.

Of all the witnesses in the plaza that day, she was closest to the President when the first shot hit him. I knew that from her vantage point, 15 feet behind the



Assassination by The Globe by Norman Wilkins

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President, she was close enough to see the bullet's impact.

The day after I found the girl on the film, I combed through all my books on the assassination but found that no one had ever made reference to this girl, let alone interviewed her. I kept saying to myself, "How could they have missed this girl — the one way Oswald could have fired all the shots, and no one ever bothered to mention her." Could someone starting 12 years after the fact possibly find her?

If she had indeed stopped running in reaction to a shot it would have placed the time of the first shot, not at 2:10:25, as the Warren Commission had said, but before 2:10g, when the girl had stopped running.

At that point, I decided that somehow, somewhere, I would have to find the girl and ask her why she had stopped. But where could I start?

Every day after school I ran down to the city library to search through the 28 volumes of evidence collected by the Warren Commission, looking for some reference to the little girl. However, I wasn't able to find a sign that anyone had ever found her, let alone interviewed her.

Suddenly, I had an insight. I realized that this girl, a 10-year-old, was too young to go see a parade downtown by herself; someone probably drove her down to see the President that day, possibly a parent. That person might be listed among the known witnesses.

That week, I started to collect as complete a list as possible of the known witnesses. It was a gargantuan task. Only a small percentage of the total number of witnesses had actually been interviewed by the Warren Commission. Most had simply filed a deposition with the Dallas County Sheriff's Office on a one-page form.

Another group received only a fleeting reference to the Commission files. Usually I saw, to my amazement, that the Warren Commission had made no attempt to locate, let alone interview, a witness logged in this manner. I had no guarantee that the girl's parents were among the known witnesses, but I knew that it was my last chance to find her.

One of the major constraints on my research was lifted when I saw a complete list of Warren Commission Exhibit call

ing at a Los Angeles swap meet. I closed my savings account and bought the books for \$125. I looked forward with excitement to no longer having to stop my search every night at nine when the library closed.

When I completed my list, I had found about 350 potential parents. I found bits of information about each and began to notice that some of the people in the plaza that day were less likely than others to be the parents or escorts of the little girl.

A major percentage of the total number of witnesses were city workers (the plaza in downtown Dallas where President Kennedy was killed was part of the civic center). The mayor of Dallas wanted to give the President as warm a welcome as possible, therefore, many city workers were given five or 10 minutes off to go see the President pass by. I knew that few, if any of them had time to get their families. So I crossed them off my list.

Next, I eliminated all security personnel. No on-duty guard wanted to split his attention between protecting the President and watching his own kids.

Since I felt that it was most likely that the girl's parents escorted her to the plaza that day, I cut from my list the names of all the witnesses who approximately 10 years before were not of child-bearing age.

Because the little girl was white, I dropped all non-white witnesses from my list because chances were that her parents, or whoever took her, were white as well.

More than anything else, it was my dream to go to Dallas myself and personally question witnesses whose testimony was never taken by the Warren Commission, in the hope that they might be able to help me discover the identity of the little girl. If all else failed.

My number was lousy. All my arguments and pleading were without a shred of success. I was not to go to Dallas. It was just too expensive a trip for a 15-year-old to take on a wild goose chase. I had to prove to her that my trip was a serious venture which would pay off.

I cross-referenced my list to a current Dallas city phone book to find each witness's present address. Unfortunately, only half were listed. I used these addresses to send each person a letter requesting an interview. After that all I could do was wait.

As the responses came back, I showed my mother letter after letter of acceptance. 25 in all, which I had received over the course of two months. It had taken that time to wear her down, but she finally gave in, with the provision that she join me in my journey.

Six days before Christmas in 1975, I flew to Dallas.

My three-day trip to Dallas was a marathon run across town, from one mile to the other and then back again, meeting with a many assassination eyewitnesses as possible.

My mother was the chauffeur, a role she patiently accepted without seeming to mind my awkward scheduling of appointments. She was a good listener who cheered on my best guesses.

At I went from questions to witness, I would ask a series of questions of each. However, not one person I spoke to had any idea of who the little girl was, or how I might be able to find her.

Finally, all our son, the morning of my departure from Dallas had arrived. I had two last interviews. My dreams of finding the little girl were fading fast. I consoled myself with the thought that I had recorded the eyewitness accounts of many who had never been questioned before.

Mom and I arrived at the home of my next-to-last witness. Once again I pointed to the girls of the little girl trudging the innocent, and asked Paul Willis, "Do you know this little girl?" In a quiet, matter-of-fact single syllable answer, he said, "No, all the neglected homework paid off."

"That's my daughter, Rosemary," he answered.

I had found her at last. Her father in fact both parents had been on the plaza that day and had taken their daughter with them.

"Can I talk to Rosemary?" I asked, my heart pounding. He picked up the phone, dialed her number and handed me the receiver after a brief introduction.

I have to be careful not to lead my witness in any way, I thought, as I crossed the room to take the phone.

DAVID LUI: Rosemary, do you remember running in Dealey Plaza behind the President's car?

ROSEMARY: Yes.

DAVID LUI: Why were you doing that?

ROSEMARY: I was trying to keep my

When David Lui, then a 15-year-old high schooler, spotted the little girl (circled) in the famous Zapruder film of the John F. Kennedy assassination, it set him off on a search that eventually led to Dallas. At right is the girl, Rosemary Willis, as she appears today. At far right is David Lui, now at Brown University.

A quick moment should be taken here to discuss what only can be described as a national phenomenon. Upon asking it appears that those who were old enough to remember the assassination can reconstruct precisely what they were doing when they heard that the President had been shot. Just imagine how sharply the imprint of their experience was stamped upon the memory of those who actually saw the President die, young and old alike.

The moment had come to ask the question which I had traveled 1500 miles to hear answered.

DAVID LUI: Why did you stop turning around when I had traveled 1500 miles to hear answered?

ROSEMARY: I stopped when I heard the shot.

With this simple reply, the firing of the first shot was pulled back to the moment before the frame in which the

had stopped running before 2:10g, thereby leaving enough time for a single assassin to have fired all the shots.

I realized that with this new evidence some of the best facts many researchers had used to expound the conspiracy theory had been refuted. With her answer, a plank was pulled from the argument for conspiracy.

No longer could there be any doubt that the little girl had stopped running in reaction to a rifle shot. Her reaction, seen on the film, was the first visible reaction to the sound of the first shot and she had confirmed it as so.

It was apparent to me that the assassination did not have to be a conspiracy simply because there was not enough time between the shots.

Epilogue

David Lui's investigation and findings

were brought to the attention of the House Select Committee on Assassinations and he was invited to present his findings to the committee in the fall of 1978. At virtually the same time that he presented this material to the committee staff, two acoustical experts were presenting testimony and evidence to the committee to the effect that gunshot reports indicating a second gunman were audible on a dispatch tape of Dallas Police Department radio traffic on the day of the assassination.

Lui was never told how much weight was given his findings, and Dallas police department radio specialists have continued to dispute the findings of the acoustical scientists.

Rosemary Willis, the little girl in the Zapruder film, is now a Dallas schoolteacher.

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