

THE FORMER LANDLADY

Statements of Witnesses - Mrs. Mary E. BLEDSOE
Deposition -

April 2, 1964, 6 H 400-27

Miss Melody June Douthit was Mrs. Bledsoe's accompanying attorney. Mrs. Bledsoe was divorced in 1925 and has lived for 24 years in a home from which she rents rooms, 621 N. Marsalis. She rented a room to Oswald who at the time showed her a picture of his wife and child.

She said she had just started renting rooms in September and kept her records on a calendar, that Oswald rented a room on the 4th, and then changed this to the 7th, but it turns out that "October of 1963 has been torn out." (p.401)

She remembered that Oswald made two trips, the first with a duffel-bag and clothes on a hanger, but she doesn't remember the kind of bag he used on the second trip, doesn't remember its color, or material; her refrain is, "I didn't pay attention." (p.402)

She doesn't know how he carried it; he had no car but used the bus which she saw him take. She said, "Of course, I had no idea he was the kind of man he was." He went to the grocery store and bought "some peanut butter, some sardines, and some bananas and put it all in his room, except the milk, and he ate there, ate in his room. I didn't like that either." (p.403)

He stayed for 5 days, having paid for a week. On Monday and Tuesday, "he stayed home and went to bed, and stayed - I didn't pay any attention to him - " Not paying attention, she still knew that he went out at 9:30 Tuesday and came home at 2:30. She then changed this to 1:30. He stayed in his room from the time he got home without leaving it until Wednesday. On Wednesday she said he left about 9 o'clock and "looked very nice. Went off Monday about 2 o'clock." Ball brings her back to Wednesday and she agrees it was Wednesday and then he got back at 1:30. After his return he used the telephone and then she says, "I

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guess it was Wednesday, but I am sure it must have been "ednesday."
She resented his talking in a foreign language. Again he didn't go
out the rest of the day or night. Thursday he went out 10 or 10:30
(p.404).

I have quoted this kind of trivia, which has taken up 5 full pages
and isn't finished, to show the kind of interest the Commission had in
Mrs. Bledsco and the kind of person and witness she was. This is more
space than was devoted to some of the witnesses for their entire testi-
mony. Mrs. Bledsco's testimony, if you'll excuse the expression, takes
up 27 pages. ^{Few} ~~From~~ of the important witnesses occupy that much space.
She keeps on interrupting Ball in a totally unnecessary reconstruction
of what she has said, because what she has said means nothing, to say
"I didn't like that," referring to his foreign language conversation
and the same phrase having to do with his interference with her nap.
This repeated expression and her allegation ^{of} ~~to~~ having been paying no
attention are almost a refrain; Although she said she was paying no
attention, she said that on Friday "he stayed in his room all day. Didn't
eat. Ate what he had in his room. Stayed in his room all day long."
What would she have known if she had paid attention?

Saturday morning he left with his bag, she doesn't know which one
("I didn't pay any attention"). She asked if he was going to move, but
he said he was just leaving for the weekend. (p.405)

She said she told him to move and when he asked for the \$2 dif-
ference, she said "well, I don't have it."

At this point she testifies about Marina's pregnancy and, when
asked, testified that Oswald hadn't told her ("didn't tell me anything."),
but that she had read it in the paper.

She wasn't even cautioned to restrict herself to what was her own
knowledge.

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She keeps grumbling about him ("I didn't like his attitude.") and while she is allowed to ramble, she just really had no complaint. All she did was say she didn't like him. From this little sample of her testimony, I am certain Oswald left because he just couldn't stand it any more.

From Mrs. Bledsoe's description of herself, it is unlikely that she was without #2.

After some more rambling and nonsense with the repetition of the same refrain, they finally get to the point where Oswald returned on Monday for his remaining bag, the description of which, the size, the character of which she doesn't remember ("I didn't pay any attention") and Ball asks when she saw him again. Her reply was, "Well, I thought, 'Well, he is gone' and forgot it." Obviously, this was not responsive, and Ball said, "But, before you go into that, I notice you have been reading from some notes before you." (p.407) Her reply was, "Well, because I forget what I have to say."

Imagine that, Larry. This is a witness who can't remember and describes her testimony as "what I have to say."

Ball asks, "When did you make those notes?" and her reply is a rephrasing of his question. Her attorney, Miss Douthitt, interrupts to say, "When Mr. Sorrels and I were talking about her going to Washington, he made the suggestion that she put all the things down on paper because she might forget something, (I'll leave out Miss Douthitt's unnecessary and lengthy direct quotation of what she told Mrs. Bledsoe to do) and that's when she started making notes."

It turns out this was during the past week, again at the suggestion of Sorrels of the Secret Service. She made no notes while Oswald was there ("I didn't pay any attention to him.")

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Asked to identify the foreign language in which Oswald spoke, she said she didn't know and asked if it was Spanish, she again said no, then while in the course of the third or fourth statement of she didn't know, she said "I do, because the girl is Spanish, but I don't know whether he called her or not." The Spanish girl turned out to be Marina. Then Mrs. Bledsco said Marina was Russian. She finally got down to the simple truth, "I don't know."

She says she saw Oswald again the day "of the parade" but, notes or no notes, she can't remember when it was: "The 22d of - the next - 22d of February - when was the parade?" Ball told her it was the 22nd of November. She was very happy to see the President.

She doesn't remember what bus she took, presumably to go home. After a number of digressions, including how awfully crowded it was - Ball thinking she meant on the bus but she meaning outside the bus - she finally said there were about 10 people on the bus. (p.408)

Finally, with great difficulty, she gets to the crucial part of her testimony: "And, after we got past Akard, at Murphy - I figured it out. Let's see. I don't know for sure. Oswald got on. He looks like a maniac. His sleeve was out here (indicating). His shirt was undone."

This she said was in reference to a hole in his shirt, "and he was dirty, and I didn't look at him. I didn't want to know I even seen him, and I just looked off, and then about that time the motorman said the President had been shot ..." the rest is more of her nonsensical trivia.

She must have made all these observations about Oswald while she wasn't looking at him. In about a half-page more of "testimony" she gets Oswald about halfway back in the bus (she was up in the front) on

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the same side she was on, but doesn't know if Oswald looked at her -
"I don't know. I didn't look at him. That is - I was just - he looked so bad in his face, and his face was so distorted."

Presumably these observations were also facilitated by her not looking at him.

It seems incredible that Ball can even let it continue, but, as we know, it is just beginning. She persists in saying she didn't look at him, and then describes what she ~~was~~ saw while she wasn't looking at him.

The next thing she saw was "He had a brown shirt." It was the right elbow that was torn. Asked, "Was the shirt open or was it buttoned?" (p.409) she replied, "Yes; all the buttons torn off."

But she doesn't know if he had on anything beneath this shirt. She noticed the color of his pants, "they were gray, and they were all ragged in here (indicating)." This was in reference to the waist seam.

She
Finally gets Oswald off the bus after saying it was "about three or four blocks" after he got on.

She said she didn't pay any attention to the motorman giving Oswald a transfer, "but I believe he did." She did not hear Oswald say anything to the motorman. (Larry, when this first happened there were lurid accounts in the paper quoting her as saying Oswald laughed and was gleeful when he told the motorman of the President's assassination. I am almost positive of this.)

Did she look at Oswald when he got off the bus? "No; I sure didn't. I didn't want to know him."

- Ball wants to know if she thought she "got enough of a glimpse of him to be able to recognize him?" She was certain, but she didn't look very carefully, not wanting to see him and hoping he didn't see her -

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which apparently he didn't - if she was there to be seen. Oswald, according to her, did not leave the middle exit but came up to the front and went out past the motorman.

Nobody got off when Oswald did (p.410), but then there was a woman who was worried about getting to the train and Mrs. Bledsoe has her first getting off four and then after Oswald did, but she also said, in the rambling way in which she is never once interrupted, "but we still didn't know the President had been killed ..." She then rambles incomprehensibly, again without interruption. I mean, Larry, if this woman had a certification from the insane asylum guaranteeing she was insane and she rambled, she'd make just as much sense as Mrs. Bledsoe did.

Larry, as I began to read this so-called testimony, I began to get a picture of a strange old talkative lady who wanted some more to talk about in her/^{own}circle of friends, if any. But as I go through it, I become convinced that she just is not rational. Talkative and rambling and all of that she is, but in addition to that she just isn't rational. She doesn't remember almost anything she is asked, or she didn't pay attention, she doesn't remember anybody knocking at the door to get on the bus, she doesn't remember whether Oswald got on between regular stops; apparently the only thing she remembered is what she had been told she "had to" (p.412).

She rambles longer than usual to answer the question, when she first notified the police about believing she'd seen Oswald, and says she had listened and paid no attention to all the accounts "about Mr. Tippen" (sic) and "didn't dawn on me"; the rest is non sequitur, but what she meant was that this was the same Oswald. All she wanted to hear about was the President; "... and they kept talking about this boy

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Oswald and had on a brown shirt, and all of a sudden, well, I declare, I believe that this was this boy, and his name was Oswald - that is - give me his right name, you know, and so, about an hour my son came home, and I told him, and he immediately called the police and told them, because we wanted to do all we could, and so, I went down the next ~~at~~ night. He took me down, and I made a statement to them, what kind of - Secret Service man or something down there." (p.412)

The police apparently had more sense and didn't show her the lineup. They showed her pictures. One can only guess, but my guess would be no pictures other than that of Oswald. She began by saying a man at the police station showed her a picture of Oswald; when asked his name, she replied, "I am so bad about names." And then asked whether there was one or more than one man, she replied, "Oh, about a dozen." She apparently reveled in the attention she got and specified there were "Two Secret Service man, and two to do this, and oh, I had interviewed about 9 or 10 or 12, plenty of them."

Ball shows her Commission Exhibit 150 and before he can tell her what it is, she interrupts to say, "That is it." Ball still tries to get on the record his identification and she keeps interrupting with the same refrain, "That is it," a total of three times, after which Ball asks her what she means by "that is it?" and she replied, "Because they brought it out to the house and showed it."

One wonders whether the police asked her or told her. (p.412)

Ball persists in trying to get an answer and twice in the next question asks her about "that is it", and all she can say is that it was brought out to her, at this point she says by "some Secret Service man."

By this time Ball must have thought he was ready to sew it up:

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"Mr. Ball. It was brought out by the Secret Service man and shown to you?"

Mrs. Bledsoe. Yes/

Mr. Ball. Had you ever seen the shirt before that?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Well -

Mr. Ball. Have you?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No; he had it on, though." (p.413)

Although she had said she had never seen the shirt before, she repeats several times that Oswald had it on when she saw him. So Ball asks her, "What is there about the shirt that makes you believe that this is the shirt that Oswald had on when he was on the bus?" She looks at the shirt and says, "Yes. See all this (indicating)? I remember that."

"Mr. Ball. Tell me what you see there?"

Mrs. Bledsoe. I saw the - no; not so much that. It was done after - that is the part I recognize more than anything.

Mr. Ball. You are pointing to a hole in the right elbow?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Yes.

Mr. Ball. What about the color?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Well, I - What do you mean?

Mr. Ball. Well -

Mrs. Bledsoe. When he had it on?

Mr. Ball. Yes.

Mrs. Bledsoe. Before he was shot? Yes; I remember it being brown.

Mr. Ball. You remember the shirt being brown. Was it this color?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Yes; it was that color." (p.413)

Plaintively, painstakingly, Ball explains to her, in terms of convincing him, that she must say "why it is that you believe this is the shirt ..." and, of course, he has to get around her blanket denial that

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that she had ever seen the shirt before the police showed it to her;

"Mrs. Bledsoe. Well, I would say it was. That hole -

Mr. Ball. Mostly the hole in the right sleeve?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Yes.

Mr. Ball. What about the color?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Yes; I remember the color.

Mr. Ball. That is a similar color, isn't it?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No; same color.

Mr. Ball. Same color?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Uh-huh.

Mr. Ball. You think that is the shirt?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Yes; it is the shirt.

Mr. Ball. Had you ever seen him wear this shirt before, when he was around your house?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No.

Mr. Ball. First time you ever saw the shirt was when you saw him on the bus?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Uh-huh." (p.413)

Ball then shows her Exhibits 156 and 157, described in the table of contents of Vol. XVI as "men's gray cotton slacks". He asks, "Have you ever seen either one of these before?" She rejects 157 and about 156, apparently finding the one thing by which she had already said she could identify it not there, said,

"Mrs. Bledsoe. That must have been it, but seemed like it was ragged up at the top.

Mr. Ball. But, you think 156 may have been the pair of pants he had on?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Yes.

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Mr. Ball. You think 157 - don't pay any attention to the fact that it is cut up - does 157 look anything like the pants he had on?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No; I don't -

Mr. Ball. You don't think so?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No, sir." (p.414)

So Mrs. Bledsoe's basis of identifying the pants was that there were only two pair/she was shown, and if it was the first, it had to be the second.

At this point Ball gave up and turned the questioning over to Mr. Jenner. Jenner goes back to the very beginning when Oswald rented the room from Mrs. Bledsoe. She doesn't remember anything at all about how Oswald looked except he looked clean. Of course, she "paid no attention." When she interrupts Jenner to digress, he tries to call her back to the subject he had in mind. (p.414)

Jenner makes a lengthy explanation of why it is important for her to identify the bag and taking his question, "Was it zippered? How was it fastened?" as a clue, she began by saying she didn't know and wound up by saying "but it seems to me it was, though." But then she decides, "I don't know whether it was zippered or not," in response to a question about the material of which it was made. She persists again in saying, "I didn't even look". When she goes off to what Oswald had on his back, Jenner says, "Now, would you mind if we stuck with the bag?" He has finally gotten her to say it was 26 inches long by the simple expedient of saying, "You are indicating about 26 inches?" He could build a description of anything that way. He turns to the shape, and she twice says she couldn't say and she paid no attention, so he turns to whether or not it had a handle, and she says in reply twice in one response that she paid no attention, emphasizing it the second time. (p.415)

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She also paid no attention to the coat hangers.

She said that because she was so nervous, Oswald made it a note on the Oct. page of her calendar, which as we have seen, was so conveniently the only one missing from the entire year.

When Miss Douthitt interrupts to try and help things, Jenner replies that "Mr. Robert Davis of the attorney general's office of Texas has come in, and I am not seeking to press you, but we have some problems of the highest degree of exactitude that we can obtain. And at the risk of boring you, I would like to go back to that bag again." Mrs. Bledsoe had her regular refrain, "Oh, that; I didn't pay much attention to it." But it doesn't stop Jenner.

If the Commission had had this kind of persistence with some of the people who might have actually been witnesses and might have actually had something worthwhile to tell it, or with some of the people who were obviously dissembling, the results of the entire investigation might have been more fruitful. He asks her if it was resting on the porch, etc., and in her response she said, "I don't know. I didn't pay - I don't know, couldn't tell you" and other similar phrases a total of 5 times in one 4-line response. (p.416)

Nonetheless, she volunteered other information, such as that Oswald told her he was unemployed, hoped to get a job and to move then when he brought his wife with him.

The picture she said was in a billfold. Jenner showed her an unidentified billfold, and she said it wasn't that type. Perhaps from the Commission's point of view, it's good that Jenner didn't identify the billfold for the Commission had Oswald's.

When Jenner says, "if you will just stick to while you're at the door now," Mrs. Bledsoe, perhaps in protest, says, "Well -" and is

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interrupted by Jenner, who in turn is interrupted by Miss Douthitt.
(p.417) Jenner makes further attempts to question her about the bag and gets a further succession of "didn't pay any attention".

When Jenner tries to find out, since Mrs. Bledsoe said her son had been in the Navy, if the son had a duffelbag, he couldn't find that out, but he found out a lot of other stuff, such as where the boy was stationed, what he did, but nothing about the bag, so they go off the record for a while.

But when they start talking about the clothes on the hanger, she has the same answer, "didn't pay any attention." (p.418)

Shd had said that Oswald took 40 minutes to get his second bag, but she doesn't know how she knew when he returned unless it was that she heard him putting his milk in the refrigerator, but he hadn't, as Jenner points out, gotten the milk. (p.419)

Emphasizing then that "Now, sticking right to that point, when did you become aware of the fact that he ^{was} then back in your home, that is, at that point?" with reference to Oswald's procurement of his second bag, and Mrs. Bledsoe said, "That he - he hadn't gotten the milk yet?" Jenner agrees, and she said, "WELL, I don't know ... I didn't pay any attention to him." She didn't see him, she had no conversation with him, ^{doesn't know how or} and she/can't explain how she arrived at the figure of 40 minutes.

Then Mrs. Bledsoe remembers Oswald had some boots. She doesn't know whether these were the first trip or the last trip, apparently forgetting she had said she didn't see him returning on the last trip, and after some talking back and forth they evolved as described as leather boots coming about 3 inches above the ankle. (p.420) They were not cowboy boots, they were leather-soled but not hobnailed; then she says he must have ^{brought} ~~brought~~ the boots on the second trip, apparently forgetting again that she hadn't seen him on the return from the second trip

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and had already testified that she hadn't entered his room while he rented it because he was supposed to take care of it.

As Jenner returns to questions about "this additional article of luggage ...", he doesn't get a chance to finish it before Mrs. Bledsoe interrupts with "I didn't pay any -" and Jenner interrupts her to say, "Please. As compared with this canvas bag, blue in color, that you just told me about?" Mrs. Bledsoe is persistent, answering negatively and getting in her "I didn't pay no attention to it at all." Jenner starts to ask her a question, but she interrupts, and she doesn't get a chance to finish before he interrupts, and all they can decide between them is that it wasn't a suitcase. (p.421)

Miss Douthitt interrupts and spends about a third of a page patiently telling Mrs. Bledsoe to take her time and not pay any attention to questions, and so forth; just think about what happened as she saw it and try to recall it. At the end of the lengthy explanation, Mrs. Bledsoe's reply is, "Well, I am getting tired." Miss Douthitt, still trying to be helpful, said, "All he wants is the truth ...". Mrs. Bledsoe, apparently recalling her memorandum pursuant to the conversation with the Secret Service man, says, "we have said most everything." When Miss Douthitt again tries to explain, Mrs. Bledsoe interrupts to say, "I am getting tired, because I havw had a stroke, you see." And that was ^{ru} ~~type~~, but they don't give the old lady any rest. Miss Douthitt resumes the questioning on behalf of the Commission and when Miss Douthitt tells her to just say it in her own words, without any questions, Mrs. Bledsoe says, "Well, I'd rather they asked, because -" Miss Douthitt interrupts her, but accomplishes nothing. Mrs. Bledsoe's reply said nothing at all and is well larded with "I don't know".

At one point during Miss Douthitt's lengthy labors on behalf of

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the Commission, she said, "...Mary, pardon me, I am not - this is not for the record." But Jenner said, "No; that's fine, leave it on the record." So Miss Douthitt spends 3-1/2 pages acting as assistant counsel for the commission. (p.422) Finally, in the middle of p.425, poor Miss Douthitt turned to Jenner and with nothing to show for her labors, apologized, saying, "I am sorry, but I ~~thought~~^{thought} ~~thought~~ in - I might help you." Jenner then asked if Oswald made a telephone call on October 8 and Mrs. Bledsoe, even after that broad hint, cannot make a meaningful response.

Finally when told that the Secret Service and FBI, after interviewing her, had made notations that she recalled Oswald called his wife on Monday afternoon, she first says, "Uh-huh", and when asked if it refreshed her recollection, said, "Well, I guess he did, uh-huh." But she had already testified she had no idea who Oswald was speaking to in a foreign language.

But ensuing questioning leads to nothing except more confusion. (p.425) They apparently are trying to get the old gal to say that in this foreign language conversation, Oswald was angry.

Apparently going on the assumption that nothing succeeds like failure, Jenner switches the subject:

"Mr. Jenner. Was there ever an occasion when you saw him in possession, either in his room, or carrying a long object wrapped in paper or a blanket or -

Mrs. Bledsoe. No.

Mr. Jenner. Or something as long as 45 inches long?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No.

Mr. Jenner. Seven or eight inches wide?

Mrs. Bledsoe. Didn't have anything like that with him.

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Mr. Jenner. Anything that you thought could be curtain rods or -

Mrs. Bledsoe. Uh-huh.

Mr. Jenner. Or shades that are on the spring, did he ever have package that looked as though that sort of thing might be contained in it?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No.

Mr. Jenner. You saw nothing of that nature in his room?

Mrs. Bledsoe. No." (p.42⁶5)

Again she starts talking about Marina's coming child and is stopped upon her admission this is not of her own knowledge. Suddenly Mrs. Bledsoe returns to the foreign language conversation and says that in her opinion (for which she cites no reason) the call was from a man, and then changes her mind to say "I don't know, so, didn't say that, because I don't know, but I never did say anything about it." At this point, Mr. Jenner says, "I believe that's about all I have." Mrs. Bledsoe again tells them she is tired. She grumbles about it. Upon Miss Douthitt's assurance that Mrs. Bledsoe can waive signing the deposition, the Commission asks if they may, Mrs. Bledsoe says, "Yes," and I can only imagine how happy they all were that it was all over.

Why the Commission wasted so much time and energy in what from the outset was clear could be nothing except a debasing, fruitless and abusive (considering the old woman's age and health) search for information the witness couldn't possibly have, I cannot understand. The record makes clear that, no matter what she said, she couldn't be depended upon. She has none of the characteristics of a witness except that she breathes and makes sounds. I just cannot possibly imagine the importance of getting a description of a bag that Oswald may or may not have had and to have placed Oswald in Mrs. Bledsoe's home - what in the

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world difference did that make in any event?

No honest man could ever refer to Mrs. Bledsoe's testimony after all the dozens and dozens of occasions on which she said she didn't know, couldn't remember, wasn't interested, didn't see, etc. But especially, why did they persist on something that was not only inconsequential, but was not in any way related to the assassination? Why did they ruin, for nobody can possibly pay any attention to anything Mrs. Bledsoe said, what chance they had of getting people to believe her identification of the ~~shirt~~^{shirt} and/or Oswald? It is clear that Oswald showed no signs of recognizing Mrs. Bledsoe. It is likewise clear that the police didn't trust her in a lineup. And boy, did they have some weak ones to observe the lineups! And the police didn't trust her to pick out the shirt from a group of shirts (I believe once she referred to the police and the other time to the Secret Service) They took one shirt out to her, and that blew up in the Commission's face despite her repetition of the statement, this is the shirt Oswald was wearing, when she said she hadn't seen it until the police showed it to her.

And the pants? If her testimony has any value at all, and I believe it is totally valueless except as an indictment of the police and the Commission, it proves that Oswald was not the man she saw because neither of the pairs of trousers they showed her had the worn mark by which she identified him in them.

Larry, even after all the incredible things I have seen in these transcripts and exhibits, even after I had long reached the conclusion that this was a deliberately dishonest job, I am still shocked at this interrogation, the only thing approximating a real interrogation I have yet seen, and I cannot see what real value it would have served and in the light of the fact that this was an old lady who had had a stroke and who repeatedly complained of being tired.