

THE PICTURE WITH A LIFE OF ITS OWN

by Dom Bonafede

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One day last winter Jones Harris, 34, walked into the Doubleday Book Shop on Fifth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets. He picked up one book after another, each time flipping the pages in a somewhat disinterested manner. Time was not of the essence to Jones Harris. A member of a prominent theatrical family (his mother is actress Ruth Gordon and his father Jed Harris), and an occasional theatrical producer in his own right (Do Re Mi, Billy Goat Eddy), he has ample means. During his meandering in Doubleday's Harris came across a special magazine issue titled in black letters, Four Dark Days in History - \$1 Collector's Copy - A Photographic History of President Kennedy's Assassination.

Harris, who had met John F. Kennedy on a couple of occasions, thoughtfully leafed through the pages. There are photographs of the smiling, handsome President and his wife, the cheering crowds, the handshakes. Then, rather abruptly, the fallen President is shown photographed through the limousine's windshield. His left arm is raised to his throat and he is beginning to lurch forward. The white-gloved hand of his wife is reaching out to him. To the left of the President Governor John Connally is slumping over onto his side. He, too, has been hit. Two Secret Service agents on the limousine behind have already swung about to see where the shots originated. The faces of the crowd, unaware of what is happening before their eyes, are fixed with smiles.

same picture as
 in Sat. Eve.
 Post, Dec. 14,
 1963

Suddenly, Harris' attention was drawn to one of the spectators far in the distant background, standing in the doorway of the Texas School Book Depository. The blurred face, to Harris, seemed to be mocking him. It couldn't be. But there it was: the high forehead, deepset eyes, tapering jawline, even the set of the mouth. The resemblance to Lee Harvey Oswald was incredible. And if the man in the doorway was Oswald, who, then, had fired the bullets which killed the President?

Harris paid for the magazine and went home. For days he did nothing. It was January; almost two full months had passed since the assassination. Who was he to try to refute findings of the FBI, the Texas state investigators and the Dallas police? All agreed that Oswald had triggered the fatal shots from the sixth floor of the warehouse.

Finally, the picture and its potential significance became an obsession. Harris became a hunter in search of answers. Who was the spectator peering out of the doorway? The authorities obviously believed it was not Oswald, but could they prove it? He began his quest with the magazine, Four Dark Days in History. It listed the publisher as "Special Publications, Inc., 6627 Hollywood Blvd., Los Angeles 28, Calif." Harris telephoned the office and was informed the photo had been circulated by Associated Press Wirephoto and could be found at Wide World Pictures, the commercial outlet for AP with headquarters in Rockefeller Center. "I went over to Wide World," Harris recalls, "and they had stacks and stacks of assassination pictures. I finally found a wirephoto of the picture I was looking for, paid \$3 for it and left."

He took the picture to a detective friend who dabbled in photography to see if it could be enlarged. The detective suggested that he obtain a positive copy of the photo. "Four or five days later I went back to Wide World and told them I had a wirephoto picture and wanted a positive print made from the original negative," Harris said. "Everything was fine except when I showed them the wirephoto, a white-haired, elderly woman told me, 'Oh, my, I believe that picture is in Washington for a photographers' contest.'

"I then went to a short, balding man who seemed to be in charge of the office. He was curt and abrupt and said he didn't know when the picture would be returned. He pointed to several stacks of pictures and said what I wanted could be in there but he doubted it. For two and a half hours I went through those files of pictures before I found a clear, positive copy."

Through a newspaper friend Harris learned of Bernard Hoffman, a free-lance photographer with the reputation of being a fine craftsman. Hoffman looked at the positive print, remarked it was fair and offered to see what he could do with it. Shooting through an intricate system of microscopes he produced a blow-up, bringing into sharp focus the Presidential limousine and the crowd behind. Harris became more convinced than ever that the question of the man in the doorway deserved to be asked, and answered.

Harris next sought to solicit official action. He thought about Senator John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, whom he had met socially. Senator Cooper would be an ideal contact as he was a member of the Warren Commission, appointed by President Johnson to conduct a definitive inquiry into the assassination. "I called Senator Cooper," Harris said. "He was busy but suggested that I come to Washington and call his office and he would come off the Senate floor to see me if he could. I didn't want to do that.

"I had known [former Supreme Court Justice] Felix Frankfurter, so I called his secretary. I knew he was sick. She said to put my information in a letter. I didn't think I should do that."

Early in February, Harris told his story to his attorney, Arnold Krakower, a New York lawyer with offices on East 53d Street. Krakower, a 48-year-old Harvard Law School graduate with rugged features, vividly remembers the day Harris called on him. "The moment I saw the enlargement I became interested. It was obvious the public had to be told whether it is or is not Oswald. If it is Oswald, how can he be upstairs firing bullets? I'm not interested in whether Oswald was a Communist, a Fascist, or whatever. I'm only interested in who did it. This country is mature enough to be told the whole truth."

The attorney said he had previously been puzzled by conflicting reports concerning the case. "We seem to have been fed a lot of pap about sound police techniques," Krakower said. "First you read that the gun aimed by Oswald when he was captured in the movie theater had misfired, that you could see the imprint of the hammer on the cartridge case. Almost at the same time they tell you another officer had put his finger between the hammer and the cartridge, preventing the bullet from being fired. One of these stories can't possibly be true. And there is no explanation why Tippit, the officer they say Oswald killed, was

one and a half miles off his beat, or why Tippit suspected Oswald in the first place. There are too many blanks in the case. I thought about the picture I don't know how long. I decided if Harris had this thing, others did too."

Krakower was dead right about others having the picture, and wondering about it. Weeks before Harris came across the picture browsing in Doubleday's, well-informed conversations in New York, Dallas and Washington turned on the identity of "the man in the doorway" of the Depository. On December 2, in fact, only ten days after the assassination, the Associated Press had circulated to member newspapers and magazines an enlargement of the picture with a circle drawn around the face in the doorway. "Photo arouses new interest," the caption read. "The photo seems to show the accused assassin Lee Harvey Oswald standing at ground level behind the motorcade at the entrance to the Texas School Book Depository" The caption went on to say, "Authorities said the man in the picture is not Oswald but another employee of the Depository."

Despite his avid researches in the AP files, Harris had not known of the AP's caption. And even if he did, subsequent events suggest, it would not have discouraged Harris from pursuing the matter. He was looking for positive proof, not undetailed assertions.

Krakower wrote to the Warren Commission and told them he wanted an appointment with J. Lee Rankin, the commission's chief counsel - "and not the FBI or anybody else." The commission replied and agreed to see Krakower and Harris. Expenses were offered but declined. On February 24 the two men kept an 11 a.m. appointment at the commission's headquarters in the Veterans of Foreign Wars building in Washington.

They met first with Charles Shaffer, a commission staff member on loan from the Justice Department. Harris recalls that Shaffer was extremely cordial and that he and Krakower discussed legal matters. "Then he turned to me," Harris said, "and asked if I knew Miles Hirson. I said no, but that I had known his brother Roger when we both attended Friends Seminary in New York City." Harris is still baffled as to how Shaffer knew of his long-ago acquaintanceship with a schoolmate.

The two showed Shaffer the blown-up assassination picture with the mystery figure in the background. Shaffer simply asked how Harris had gotten the picture and the process used in its enlargement. Afterwards, the three men were called into J. Lee Rankin's office. Perfunctory greetings followed and Rankin inspected the picture. "He did not say one word while we were in there," Krakower said later. "He didn't register a thing."

The three men returned to the other office and Shaffer brought out a huge photograph of the same scene. "They obviously had been studying this from every angle," remarked Krakower. "Shaffer said he did not know if it was Oswald, but that the commission was fascinated by it. I told him my client was thinking of writing an article for publication on the subject. He asked if we would please not write anything or release any publicity about it and to cooperate with the commission. I agreed."

The three next had lunch together. Shaffer gave Krakower telephone numbers where he would be reached at his home and at his Justice Department and Warren Commission offices. Shaffer

reportedly told them to call or write to him at any time and assured them that he would keep in touch with them. Harris and Krakower then returned to New York.

A few weeks later Harris finally learned that the man shown in the doorway had been reliably identified as one Billy Lovelady, a warehouseman at the Book Depository who had worked with Oswald. Unknown to Harris and Krakower, Lovelady had been identified as the figure in the picture by the FBI the day after the assassination. (This was, apparently, the source for the AP caption put out on December 2.)

This development did not deter Harris and Krakower. "What we want is conclusive proof that the man is not Oswald, not just the bland assurance it is Lovelady," Krakower says. "There should be a total investigation of this facet of the case. The president of the American Bar Association was appointed 'defense counsel' to Lee Harvey Oswald by the Warren Commission. He should be allowed to cross-examine Lovelady as if Oswald were alive and on trial and had introduced this picture as evidence in his defense. God, I hope it isn't Oswald in the picture. But I want it established beyond any doubt at all."

For some two weeks after their Washington meeting, Shaffer and Krakower continued to communicate by mail and telephone. In a letter written early in March, Krakower pointedly referred to an article published in Commentary, which raised several provocative questions relative to the assassination and the investigation. He has not since heard from Shaffer or any other staff member of the commission.

Because he believes the commission did not act in good faith with him, Krakower no longer feels bound to keep his pledge of silence. "In this case, involving the assassination of the President of the United States, if there was any kind of conspiracy and the fact was concealed and I was in a position to contribute one scintilla of evidence and didn't do it, I wouldn't be able to live with myself," he commented. "Where do I get off bucking the commission? Maybe better minds are right. But you always end up saying the truth is the truth and no S.O.B. has a right to say it is not Oswald unless he supplies proof. That's all we are asking. I pray it is Lovelady."

Both Harris and Krakower have taken precautions against someone trying to halt their private crusade. Krakower has written letters detailing his involvement in the case, to be held in escrow against the chance that something happens to him. Harris has placed a positive print of the assassination scene in a Manhattan bank vault. He keeps all his photos, correspondence dealing with the case, magazine articles and other paraphernalia in a sea-lion skin traveling bag.

Last month Harris hired a young man named Bill Beckman, of Fort Worth, to go to Dallas and attempt to get a picture of Lovelady. It wasn't long before Lovelady realized he was being shadowed. He would spot Beckman sitting in a pickup truck near the loading platform of the Book Depository or trailing him on foot. He always managed to elude Beckman or duck just as his picture was about to be snapped. This by-play went on for almost three weeks. Beckman, however, was determined to succeed. One Friday as Lovelady was about to quit work, Beckman stationed himself outside on the sidewalk. He later described the episode in a report: "At 4:40 I saw L. and a blonde (20 years) girl, I edged back and waited, camera poised. The girl, from around the

corner, stamped up in a rage and slapped my right forearm and began an abusive tirade." The "blonde girl," as Beckman later learned to his surprise, was Lovelady's wife. Lovelady, meanwhile, had called a patrolman who was directing traffic and the three were taken to police headquarters. They were then transferred to the police surveillance office and after some questioning were released. Beckman was advised to leave Dallas.

Lovelady is flatly unwilling, understandably so, to have his picture published. As he put it, in a Texas drawl heavy enough to chew on, "Some crazy S.O.B. might take a shot at me because I look like Oswald." He does, in fact, bear a similarity to Oswald. He is about an inch shorter, stockier and his hair, sparse like Oswald's, is a bit darker. But an impressionistic camera image could minimize these differences. "Hell, I'm better lookin' than he was," Lovelady enjoys saying.

Lovelady maintains it is he standing in the doorway at the moment of the assassination. "I was standing on the first step," he told me when I interviewed him two weeks ago in Dallas. "Several people in the picture saw me. That lady shading her eyes works here on the second floor."

Lovelady said that the night following the assassination two FBI agents visited his home. "They said they had a blown-up picture they wanted me to see. Right away I pointed to me and they seemed relieved. One had a big smile on his face because it wasn't Oswald. They said they had a big discussion down at the FBI and one guy said it just had to be Oswald."

Lovelady recalled that shortly after the assassination when Oswald's image appeared and reappeared on television programs, his two stepchildren, a boy six and a girl four, would point to the screen and say, "There's daddy." He said that while watching the motorcade from the doorway of the Book Depository he distinctly heard three shots - "there was one, then a pause and two fast ones." In the confusion that followed he said he ran 75 to 100 yards to where the Presidential limousine had been, "but, man, they were going by that time." He returned to the warehouse and a roll call was taken of the dozen or so men in his work gang. Only Oswald was missing.

Lovelady remembers that on the morning of November 22, the day of the assassination, he had seen Oswald on the sixth floor of the warehouse. "I was putting in some flooring and he came over and asked about some book orders. We had a 10 o'clock break, then went back to work until noon, when we knocked off for lunch and to see the President." He said he could not recall whether Oswald went downstairs with the rest of the men because both were working on different jobs. And besides, Oswald didn't mingle much.

Lovelady does not attempt to disguise his dislike of Oswald. "He was quiet, carried on no conversation. He'd keep to himself mostly. He might read a book or a magazine or something but he'd have nothing to do with nobody. He'd ask a question about the orders, maybe, but that's about all. I can talk to a guy a couple of minutes and tell whether I like him. I didn't like Oswald."

Lovelady is more than a little irked by the attention he has received over the picture that still haunts Jones Harris. "The FBI, Secret Service, and the Warren Commission have all questioned me I don't know how many times," he remarked. He remains dead set against having his picture taken. "I got a wife and three

kids to take care of and don't want trouble by having my mug in a newspaper," he explains.

J.W. Altgens, veteran AP photographer in Dallas, recalls shooting the classic assassination picture in great detail. "I was about 30 feet in front of the President 's limousine on Mrs. Kennedy's side. I remember hearing what I thought was a firecracker at the instant I snapped the picture. I was going to make another picture, the one I was really set up for, when I realized what had happened and I froze, aghast."

Ten days ago, still brooding over the picture, Jones Harris flew to Dallas, met with Lovelady and talked with him for about a quarter of an hour. Lovelady told him, yes, it was he standing in the doorway. Lovelady also told him that the FBI had taken several pictures of him, presumably to compare with the AP picture of the assassination scene.* Lovelady also said that on November 22 he was wearing a red-and-white striped sport shirt buttoned near the neck.]

[Harris left Dallas still unconvinced. "I admit there is a strong resemblance between Lovelady and the blow-up of the figure standing in the doorway," he said. "But the figure in the picture does not appear to be wearing a striped shirt and it is buttoned very low, showing much of his white T-shirt. Why doesn't the FBI or the Warren Commission have Lovelady pose in the doorway and have Altgens take a picture from the same distance and with the same camera as on November 22?"]

[Altgens, one of the very few witnesses who was close enough actually to see the President shot, is able to describe in minute detail what happened at that terrible moment. Yet, he has never been questioned by the FBI or the Warren Commission.]

The Warren Commission is expected to release its full report on the assassination of President Kennedy in a matter of weeks, perhaps before June is out. Jones Harris hopes the report will resolve all his doubts about the identity of the man in the doorway. Until then, Harris insists on doubting. "It's all very strange," he says.

*The FBI told the Herald Tribune that it had turned over to the Warren Commission everything it had on the assassination and that it could not furnish a picture of Billy Lovelady at this time.

(complete)