
MARINA OSWALD

WHAT WILL SHE TELL HER CHILDREN?

by **SID ROSS**

Suppose your husband had allegedly assassinated the President of the United States?

What would you tell your children? Would you tell them the truth or would you avoid the entire subject?

Would you leave the city of his alleged crime?

Would you change your name?

How does Lee Harvey Oswald's widow, Russian-born Marina Oswald, feel about Americans—and about America? And how do Americans feel about her?

Recently Mrs. Oswald sat in her five-room rented ranch home here on the edge of Dallas and spoke about these questions. She allowed **PARADE** to be the first publication to examine the 6,000 letters she has received since last November. And she talked about what these letters—and this reception—mean for her, and her children's, future.

To Marina, Americans are kind, generous, compassionate people—the kind she wants to live among for the rest of her life. It is not only the letters they have written, or the \$70,000 they have spontaneously contributed. It is the thoughtfulness the letters have shown, the warmth, friendship and sympathy offered a frightened woman from a foreign land.

Take, for instance, the way American widows, themselves hardly the most fortunate of persons, have rallied to her aid. "These are women with many more problems than I have," she says. "They have known tragedy, too, but they have no one to help them. Most of them have not much money, and what they have they need. Yet they willingly offer it to me."

Or take the response from American children: "Children are always writing, and their letters have helped me very much," says Mrs. Oswald. "One Sunday school class wrote and told me how they all got together and baked a cake and sold it and sent me the money. Letters like this tell me I am doing right to bring up my June and my Rachel in this country. I know American children will be honest and nice and friendly with them when they are older."

ADVICE AND PROPOSALS

In the letters Mrs. Oswald has received, and which still arrive every day from all states of the Union and from abroad, writers have offered her all kinds of help and assistance—not to mention money. Some have offered their homes. Others have suggested adopting the children, and still others have proposed marriage. The writers have also been generous with advice—that she change her name, that she go abroad or move to another state, that she go into hiding.

But she declares, "I want to stay here, in Dallas. I like Dallas. People here in Texas are very friendly, especially with children. After what happened, people were more friendly than they had ever been before. I visit back and forth with my neighbor on the corner, and another neighbor takes me shopping in the car.

"The suggestions that I change my name or give up my children—I could not do that. I am not proud of my name and my position, but I am not ashamed of them. I did nothing guilty. As for the children,



After the shot heard around the world: Marina scans letters of sympathy, advice and proposals of marriage.



Marina Oswald, widow of alleged assassin Lee Oswald, relaxes in garden with June, 2½, and Rachel, 9 months.

without them, I have no reason for living.

"I have not thought of another marriage. It is too serious a matter to be entered into the way some men have suggested in their letters—like picking me from a Sears, Roebuck catalog."

In dress and in manner, Marina Oswald, 23, today seems thoroughly American. She likes to dress in tight Capri pants and blouses and favors heavy eye make-up. She wears her dark blonde hair short and lightly teased and chain-smokes mentholated cigarettes. Even her home is thoroughly American. Interestingly, there is no photo of Lee Oswald to be seen in the house.

When Oswald was shot by Jack Ruby, two days after the assassination, his wife, who had been in the U.S. less than two years, spoke virtually no English. Today, however, she can make herself understood in the language, although in her interview with *PARADE*, a Russian friend helped with translation. But she insisted on reading, or having read to her, every one of the letters Americans have sent. She has sent thank-you cards to everyone who contributed money.

"These letters have given me courage and strength," she says. "I'm not really strong myself, but they have helped me. They give me courage and inspiration."

Many express regrets that her husband could not have lived to have a fair trial—"in the truly American way." Most are forgiving, and many are inspired by religious feeling.

Typical is one from a woman in Fort Worth, Tex.:

"Bitterness and hatred have deprived you of a husband and your children of a father, even as they have Mrs. Kennedy . . . The days ahead will be difficult, and so a group of us who believe in Christian love wish to convey to you and your children our concern."

"The hearts of all Americans go out to you," a California woman wrote. "We sincerely hope that life in America will be worth-while for you and your children, and that the tragedy that touched so many lives will be completely erased from the memory of all."

Several women tried to give Mrs. Oswald moral courage from their own lives. "I am a widow 74 years old, and life has hit me on all sides, but nothing has ever happened to me which caused me to hang my head in shame," wrote one. Another wrote poignantly: "I know from personal experience what a wife suffers when her husband brings shame down upon her and her children."

"I feel sorry," Marina says. "I feel ashamed. It is a great loss to a country to lose its President. He had much more to give the nation. But first of all I feel sorry for poor Jackie because she lost her husband, the father of her children."

Twice Mrs. Oswald wrote letters of sympathy to the President's young widow. But she has never been able to summon up the courage to mail them. "I feel this would make too much pain for her," she says. "I don't believe she would want a letter from me."

'BECAUSE HE WAS A FATHER'

And when she was in Washington to appear before the Warren Commission, Mrs. Oswald wanted to visit the Kennedy grave in Arlington National Cemetery and place flowers—"not so much because he was President but because he was a father." But in the end she hung back. "I was afraid of how people would react, that they would say I did not belong there."

Yet she did not speak harshly of the wispy, strange young man who found her in the Soviet Union and brought her to the United States as his bride. "If Lee killed the President," she says in a quavering voice, "I am sorry. We have lost a husband and father. If he killed the President it was also his fate, his punishment from above, to get killed himself."

She plans to tell June and Rachel all about Lee Oswald as soon as they are old enough to understand. "I wonder how I will do it," she says, "but I do not want them to hear first from someone else. I will tell them the bad and the good things about Lee. I am glad that I have two little girls. It would be much harder with boys. Boys always want to make heroes of their fathers."

And Mrs. Oswald does not hope for the execution of Jack Ruby. She is opposed to capital punishment for anyone. "Besides," she notes, "he will execute himself every day as long as he lives." Nor does she feel any

bitterness toward the Dallas police, in whose custody her husband was when he was fatally shot. "It could have happened anywhere, in any city," she says.

Mrs. Oswald has given a good deal of thought to her adopted land as opposed to her native one. She notes that Lee Oswald, when he was unemployed, drew more money from the government than he would have if he had been employed as a young engineer in the Soviet Union. She was also startled to find that she and June and Rachel were entitled to Social Security payments, in spite of the way Lee Oswald died.

"The United States government is so human; it does not deprive children of what they need," she says. "In Russia if my husband had killed Khrushchev, I do not know what would have happened. . . ."

She also has been startled by how few Americans have condemned her and her children for the alleged crimes of her husband. On the other hand, one woman sent her \$1—"for the service your husband did for the country." Mrs. Oswald sent it back.

And, interestingly, she has never received a letter from a Communist country—even from her closest relative, an uncle who lives in Leningrad.

But to Americans, Mrs. Oswald is grateful—and she asked *PARADE* to convey her thanks to all America. Sitting down at a table, she wrote neatly in Russian:

"My children and I sincerely thank the American people for their moral support during such a difficult time. I wish there could always be understanding and good will between the American and the Russian people, and between all people in the world."

Then, in English, she concluded:

"Sincerely, Mrs. Marina Oswald and Children."