

Marina

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Oswald's

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Story

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Herald Tribune photos by HELEN YENNE



In an exclusive interview, Marina Oswald talked with Helen Yenne, a free lance writer, about her life with Lee Harvey Oswald, the man who died before he could be brought to testify about the shooting of President Kennedy. The Oswald story is at the center of a report being prepared by the Warren Commission on the assassination. That report will be issued soon, perhaps next week. This interview, with a woman who seldom talks to the press about her life with a strange, tortured man, is an insight into what the report will contain. The first installment is on Page 12.

Oswald as Seen Through

His Wife's Eyes

Their father and her husband murdered the President of the United States: This is Marina Oswald with her daughters. June Lee is 5 and will go to school next year. Rachel Marina was unborn at the time her father fired the shots that astonished the world last November. Marina Oswald gave this exclusive interview to Helen Yenne, a freelance writer and former Dallas resident. Their close friend Katyn Ford, fluent in Russian and English, served as interpreter. Today's installment of the two-part series reveals Mrs. Oswald's impressions of the diary her husband kept during his stay in Russia and sets forth poignant recollections of her life with him. The final article will appear tomorrow.

By Helen Yenne
A Special Correspondent

Lee Harvey Oswald, accused assassin of President Kennedy, did not start writing his Russian diary the day he arrived in Moscow, but much later—after he made up his mind to return to the United States, in fact.

It was not a true diary at all, but was written and rewritten by Oswald until he was satisfied that his image in it would be favorable to any one reading it back home.

These and other disclosures came from Oswald's widow, Marina, when I interviewed her at her Richardson, Texas, home.

"Lee wrote the diary to show himself as he wanted people in America to see him," Marina told me through a Russian interpreter as we sat around a table in her rented home, studying together a copy of the journal that has been called one of the most important pieces of evidence weighed by the Warren Commission investigating the assassination.

"Why did his image worry him?" I asked.

"He was afraid he would be arrested for his defection when he came home from Russia," she replied.

BEGAN IN 1961

Although the diary began, logically, with Oswald's arrival in Moscow on Oct. 16, 1959, Marina is satisfied that he did not even decide to write it until early 1961. "He confided not long after we met that he had begun, about a month earlier, to write a diary of his life in our country," she said. "He was writing about the first year-and-a-half from memory."

Oswald met Marina in Minsk on March 17, 1961, six weeks after he had written the American Embassy in Moscow that he wanted to go home. They were married April 30.

In our interview, Marina discussed, always through an interpreter, her reactions to the diary, what she knew of how it was written and such interpretations of its contents—and significant omissions—as she could provide.

Marina was never provided with a Russian translation of the diary by the Warren Commission. She was asked to identify it and certain passages were read to her by the commission's interpreter.

When the diary was leaked to the press, no one was more shocked than Marina. A Russian friend in Dallas telephoned her early on Saturday, June 27, to say that the Dallas Morning News was out with a full-page copy-righted story on the diary by a reporter to whom Marina had granted an interview only two weeks previously.

Presumed to be a probable source of the leak, Marina had, in fact, never owned a copy of the diary or read it. "Lee was very secretive about the diary once we were married," she said. "He did not often let me see him working on it, even though I could not read English."

After the Dallas News story, Marina did give permission to Life magazine to publish its copy of the diary. Life agreed to provide her with a copy later. It is the only one she has ever possessed.

When I first saw Marina, she had still not learned the diary's full contents. She listened intently as the interpreter read the complete text in Russian.

DID NOT READ ENGLISH

"Where did he say that?" she would interrupt, asking to see a particular passage even though she could not decipher Oswald's English words. "I used to tease Lee that he should have married one of the girls in Minsk who knew English. He said he would never have done that. I think now that he did not want a wife who could understand all that he was reading or writing."

Although Oswald wanted to return to the United States when he met Marina, he deceived her about his desire. Several weeks after they were wed, he revealed his true intentions and she agreed to go with him if permitted. She was already pregnant with their first child when she flew to Moscow in July to apply at the American Embassy for immigrant status.

Remembering that her husband was delighted that he was to become a father, Marina thought it odd that he failed in his diary to mention her pregnancy until his November-December, 1961, entry. He wrote then that he was wavering about going to the United States and attributed it to the strain of waiting for the necessary documents and to her pregnancy. Things did not look so bright, he wrote, especially with the onset of "the hard Russian winter."

HATED COLD WEATHER

Marina smiled and said something that indicated that Oswald's real Russian enemy might have been the same that defeated Napoleon—General Winter. "Lee hated the cold. He would tell me, 'One more Russian winter and I die.'"

Marina was acclimated to long months of snow and ice. "I told Lee," she said, "that if he was so impatient, he could leave Russia without me."

He did not go without her, but once in the United States he would try to hide the fact that she was Russian. Once in New Orleans, to Marina's great annoyance, he told someone she was a Czech.

This mention of citizenship prompted me to ask about the diary entry for Jan. 4, 1961, in which Oswald described his rejection of Soviet citizenship. His initial request had been turned down in October, 1959.

"I do not know that Lee was offered citizenship," Marina said, "though I am inclined to doubt he was. But Lee was never one to let down his guard before others. If somebody did not give him what he wanted, he would pretend he never wanted it."

I asked Marina how worried her husband had been about his chance of getting back home.

"Lee was very worried," she said. "The delays in securing the documents we needed made him so nervous that winter (1961-'62) that he couldn't sleep. He used to stay up all night worrying. That was when his hair started to fall out."

"Did the loss of his hair worry Lee, too?"

"Oh, yes," she said, laughing a little. "He didn't think he looked as good as before. I used to massage his scalp with castor oil. In Russia we think that makes hair grow back, but it didn't work for Lee."

SHOWED TENSION

Reaching for an envelope of snapshots, she selected one of Lee taken in May, 1961, just after their marriage. "See, he has lots of thick wavy hair," she gestured. Then she picked out one taken in their apartment almost a year later. Oswald, only 22 then, had clearly lost much hair. Marina noted something else. "He looks so tense in this picture—in the earlier ones he was always smiling."

The second picture showed Lee and Marina with their infant daughter, June Lee. I asked Marina whether the account of June's birth in the diary was accurate. It was, but she found it singular that his report was so unemotional.

"The morning (Feb. 15, 1962) I awakened Lee to tell him I had pains, there was no way he could get me to the hospital except to take me on the bus. He was very ashamed about it."

Marina mentioned that in New Orleans, during the hot, muggy summer of 1963 when she was pregnant with their second child, Lee had been terribly embarrassed that he could not afford to send her to a doctor for pre-natal checkups.

They went to New Orleans after Lee lost a job in Dallas. "When he lost it," said Marina, "he forgot everything, began to play with guns, neglected his personal appearance as if he no longer cared how he looked."

Marina did not remember the exact date his job ended, but a check showed it was on April 6. On April 10 someone shot at Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker, a Dallas right-wing leader. Oswald told Marina it was he who had done it. The rifle is believed to have been the same as the Kennedy murder weapon.

"People wonder why I did not go to the police after Lee shot at Walker," Marina said. "But I was a wife and mother. Lee and I had only each other. I had no parents to turn to, and Lee didn't get along well with his mother."

"I honestly thought I could talk him out of the idea of trying to kill anybody. I thought he would change, grow up, get over his silly ideas."

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TOMORROW: In a continuation of her exclusive interview, Helen Yenne tells Marina Oswald's personal reminiscences of her husband, of how he smuggled his controversial diary out of Russia.