Prelude to Tragedy:

The woman who sheltered Lee Oswald's family tells her story

by Jessamyn West

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In the black days last November when murder followed assassination, a third and contradictory act was reported in the press. This act was reported because it also had to do with Lee Oswald, Friday's alleged assassin and Sunday's victim. A Mrs. Ruth Paine, a Quaker, had taken in Lee Oswald's pregnant wife and baby daughter while he was out of work; and on weekends Lee Oswald himself had sometimes visited his family in Mrs. Paine's home in Irving, a suburb of Dallas. It was from the Paine home that Oswald, carrying "curtain rods," went to his job Friday morning in the School Book Depository on Elm Street.

There are people, I have discovered, who missed these accounts of Ruth Paine. All their available emotional energy was spent on the principals in the tragedy—the President, his wife and the President's murderer. There was scarcely enough emotion left, even, for more than consternation when Jack Ruby shot down Lee Oswald.

I thought about Mrs. Paine, however. What she had done stuck in my mind more even than what Oswald or Ruby had done. Perhaps this was because of some personal need to associate myself with what is creative, not destructive; with what is responsible, not irresponsible. But it was also, I think, because such an act was so desperately needed in that weekend of violence and destruction; it was needed not only morally, as a reminder to us that the desire to foster human life as well as to destroy it still survived in the world; it was needed aesthetically, as the knocking on the door in *Macbeth* is needed after the bloody events that have preceded it. The spectators who, because of television, were very near to being participants required emotional rest. And the happenings of that weekend, looked at as drama, required, after assassination and murder, Mrs. Paine's "concern" (to use a Quaker word) for the Oswalds if those happenings were to give any balanced account of the human condition.

Now, history, of course, has no interest in giving balanced accounts of human nature. History can go for long stretches without ever bringing to attention those acts of kindness, of unselfishness, of brotherly concern, that are always coexistent with acts of violence and bloodshed. Some of us on occasion may be capable, as Mrs. Paine was, of doing unto others as we would be done by. But when it comes to reading matter, we want what is bloody and violent. It is entirely possible, on the weekend when we all watched the assassination of President Kennedy and the shooting of Lee Oswald, that hundreds or even thousands of women were doing exactly what Ruth Paine was doing: offering food, shelter and friendship to a family in need of it. These women will never be known to us. They did not befriend the family of a man accused of assassinating the President.

We should not delude ourselves about this. I would not have gone to Dallas to talk to a woman who for six years had taken care of her bedridden stepfather and his older half-blind sister. Though her act might, in a scale assaying human devotion, outweigh Mrs. Paine's tenfold. You would not be reading my account of *that* visit. We are interested in what Mrs. Paine did because *Lee Oswald* and his family were the recipients of Ruth Paine's hospitality. From a bedroom in *her* home Lee Oswald rose that Friday morning; in *her* kitchen he made and drank his morning coffee. From *her* garage he picked up his rifle. With a neighbor of *hers* he rode to his work, rested, refreshed, well-armed.

We may love goodness, cherish compas- *(Continued on page 84)*

PHOTOGRAPH OF RUTH PAINE BY MARVIN KONER

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sion, honor unselfishness; but we have a hard time getting around to reading about them unless they are somehow bloodstained and tear-splashed. When Ruth Paine suggested to Marina Oswald that she escape a trip back to Russia that Marina did not want to make, and which Lee Oswald was suggesting, by sharing Mrs. Paine's home, she was all unknowing, guaranteeing that her act of hospitality meet these requirements.

I wrote Mrs. Paine a letter asking if I could interview her, and followed the letter with a phone call. The letter, I later discovered, had put Mrs. Paine off. Because I had read some accounts charging Mrs. Paine with everything from unjustifiable guilelessness to downright cooperation, I was at pains to let her know that I was not such a one. Mrs. Paine, as a result, was afraid that my desire was to place her on a pedestal. This she did not want.

During my phone call I formed such a definite picture of Ruth Paine that when I finally met her, I had at first the feeling that I was dealing with someone else. I am not sure what elements had contributed to my original picture. It was not her voice alone, cool, soft, collected; or her diction, cultivated; or her courtesy, which, in spite of her lack of enthusiasm for my project, never failed. The picture I had of her was also of the woman reported by the press, the "Quaker and housewife." Now, I know that Quakers and housewives come in all sizes and colors; and that motherliness, which I had attributed to her because of her solicitude for the young Marina Oswald, has more than one configuration. Nevertheless, I had seen Ruth Paine so clearly as small, rounded, maternal, that when I met a tall girl, five-feet nine or ten, with a long brown bob, looking more like the campus than the kitchen and built more like a dancer than a Quaker (whatever that may mean, except that her outlines were more rakish than restrained), I was unable for the first hour to accept her as Ruth Paine. I talked with her as if she were someone empowered to speak for Ruth Paine.

On my first evening in Dallas, Mrs. Paine asked me to come to her place at six for dinner. I left my hotel at five thirty. My taxi driver, a former truck driver, was in his third day of taxi driving, and while he could have taken me unerringly to California, he had some difficulty finding the Paine home.

The countryside we drove through was hideous, as is the urban sprawl outside most growing cities. Here a great empty space, a horizon world-shaped, and impressive because of its inhumanity, had been littered with buildings. Openness and the onetime grandeur were lost in the pockings of subdivisions and shopping centers and overpasses.

"Is this the chief road between Irving and Dallas?" I asked the driver.

He told me it was. Down this highway, then, Oswald had ridden that Friday morning, past pole oaks and hackberry trees, leafless then as now, past signs for Corn Dogs and Jax beer and weekend specials on coffee and margarine and steak. It was this remembered fact, I thought, as well as the smoky gloom of the sunset and the pity of a wild beauty lost and a domestic beauty not yet achieved, that made me feel sorrowful and apprehensive.

We were late; the ex-truck driver was not yet accustomed to locating private homes. He pulled up finally in front of a small, light gray frame house. A young man waited at the curb to greet me. Since I understood that Ruth Paine was separated from her husband, I had no idea who he might be. He was tall, dark, slender; and in the snap judgments that come to one unbidden, I characterized him as probably intelligent and possibly moody. He turned out to be Ruth Paine's husband, Michael, from whom she had been separated for a year or more before the assassination but who had since rejoined his family. He took me up the short pathway to the house and I experienced the shock of meeting the "real" Ruth Paine: the Quaker who looked more like the campus than the meetinghouse; the mother built more like a dancer than a housewife; the voice which, without aid of long-distance wires, was warmer and more spirited than the one I remembered.

From the Paines' living room I could see the dining room, which was really an extension of their kitchen. I went to the kitchen to offer my help with the dinner preparations, saying, however, that I myself never wanted guests in the kitchen; that I couldn't talk and do anything else.

Ruth Paine said matter-of-factly, "If you have children, you either learn to talk and cook at the same time or starve."

The children, tall for their ages, came in from outside then—Lynn, aged four, her brother Christopher, three. They were composed children, not required or inclined to make much ado over a visitor. And, as I realized later, there had been too much coming and going in that house recently for the advent of a single dinner guest to make much impression. They were actually more accustomed to numbers of people than I. "Lynn," her mother told me, "watches television. She knows what has happened. She knows that Lee killed the President."

The dinner, simple and good, appeared with dispatch in spite of our talk. I thought there might be silent grace before dinner. There was none. Later I learned that this was not always the case. And that once when Lee Oswald was at the table and heads were bowed, he had made sounds of disapproval in his throat. He was an atheist, able to swallow the food of believers but impatient with their desire to consecrate the occasion with prayer.

There was also nothing to drink, before or with the meal, except water. Ruth, who is extremely sensitive about sailing under false colors, particularly if they make her out to be better than she thinks she is, explained that this lack was the result not of teetotalism but of supplies. They usually had a drink before dinner when they had company, but had run out of the necessary ingredients.

There were candles on the table; and what was most memorable to me about the meal was not anything said there, but Ruth Paine's smile in the candlelight as she turned to listen to her husband.

We spoke no word of the Oswalds at the dinner table. I felt that we were consciously avoiding the subject, as drivers, not caring to be thought morbid, drive past the wrecked car and sprawled bodies. Wreckage and sprawled bodies were a part of my purpose in being in Dallas and at that dinner table. But it was not an opportune time to approach them. That was the week when Marina Oswald was reported to be changing lawyers and firing managers. It was the week when Ruby jurors were being chosen; and Dallas was filled with correspondents from Europe as well as America, come to see justice done—with fireworks, if possible. It was the week of Mrs. Oswald Sr.'s triumphs on the lecture platform, with receipts of $5,000 reported in return for her oratory.

Were we also vultures gathered round the same bodies and feasting on the same tragedy? That possibility had to be faced. And while I could tell myself, perhaps smugly, that what I wanted to associate myself with, to report and to celebrate, was not murder and assassination, violence and destruction, but their opposites, still, as I have already said, I knew that I would not be in Dallas or dining with the Paines except for the fact that their lives had been touched by violence.

Michael and I went to the living room, leaving Ruth to put her children to bed with songs and story reading. The living room was small, 14 by 16 at the most, and it showed signs of occupancy by children. There were no flowers, no knickknacks, none of the gadgetry of the charm schools of furnishing. There were some oils, and two replicas, rather large, of classical statuary. It was a room that had entered into no competition with the Joneses; objects in that room would not take precedence over persons. A sofa occupied most of the space against the longest wall; opposite it was a sizable television set. Here Ruth Paine and Marina Oswald had first learned of the President's assassination. Here Lee Oswald had spent several weekend afternoons sprawled on the floor, watching sports events. My eyes, in spite of themselves, went to that spot on the floor.

Ruth Paine is not a woman to denounce others. But one of the few "good" things she could find to say about Lee Oswald had to do with his television viewing. He watched football, and while he did so he played with Christopher, let Christopher climb over him as he sprawled on the floor.

I told Michael that Ruth's "kindness to the Oswalds" (and Ruth herself never permitted me to use this phrase without reminding me that she had gained as much in her association with Marina Oswald as she had given) had its greatest significance for Americans not as an act in itself but as a symbol of a way of life we were losing: the old way of life when as a rural and frontier country we were genuinely concerned for the welfare, the fortunes and misfortunes of our neighbors.

The man helped by the Good Samaritan might have survived without help—who knows? But how about the Samaritan—could he have survived? What would have been the state of his heart and character had he ignored the man in the ditch and been, instead of a "good," not necessarily a "bad" but simply an "indifferent" Samaritan?

What lies ahead for us if we follow our present trend toward indifference? All of us represented by slotted and numbered cards in the IBM machines, but aloof from any emotional involvement with each other? Ready to provide an adequate donation, the appropriate bureau, the efficient machinery to care for all human predicaments. But not a hand, not a heart. What will be the result of this continuing dehumanization? Is it possible that the death of a president does not present the threat to our country presented by the deaths of individual hearts? That we have less to fear from the violence of an occasional crackpot than we have from the wholesale drying up of all genuine concern for our neighbors? I spoke to Michael Paine of these feelings while Ruth was out of the room. He agreed with me that there was a need for more openness, more sharing, more risk-taking, in our personal relations.

Michael Paine had not seen much of Lee Oswald. But he did see him on Friday nights, when Michael was accustomed to visit and have dinner with his family. On these nights Lee Oswald, who usually came out from Dallas to spend the weekend with Marina, might also be there.

"I sometimes wonder if I gave up too soon with Lee," Michael said. "I wonder if my patience had held out longer, or my desire to help him had been stronger, if I could have done something for him."

He had tried to talk to Oswald. He was genuinely interested in Oswald's reasons, first for leaving America, then for leaving Russia. Oswald was either uninterested in, or incapable of, that kind of conversation which, through shared insights, advances to an understanding of a subject that is impossible to either man alone.

"Oswald," said Michael, "had picked up some pat political opinions, mostly from his Marxian reading. And once he had expressed these, he lost all interest in the conversation. He had no ability or desire to examine specific cases or to determine whether or not they cast some doubt on the generalization he was quoting. He didn't want his generalizations disturbed."

It was not surprising to me that a man of Oswald's reported IQ (around 103) did not make a stimulating conversational partner for Michael Paine. Michael once took Oswald to a meeting of the American Civil Liberties Union. Oswald, when he found that the organization was nonpolitical, that it had no program other than to protect the constitutional rights of individuals, was not interested.

"In one of our arguments," Michael said, "I told Lee that all the civilized values I hold dear are diminished or lost by acts of violence. But he held such human values in contempt, the same contempt in which he held most human beings. I gave up arguing with him then."

Joining us, Ruth recalled some of her own feelings when she had heard Michael argue with Oswald about his philosophy and politics.

"I thought that Lee was really much more moved by his feelings than by his ideas. I felt that meeting his arguments with arguments was quite irrelevant and wouldn't touch him, that the only way his life would ever be changed would be through matters that affected his feelings. As long as he had trouble holding a job and was worried about money, he would indict the society in which he lived."

"Do you think ten thousand dollars a year might have cured Oswald of his murderous impulses?" I asked her.

"Of course, I had no idea or hint then that he *had* murderous impulses. Now I think that economic security would not have been enough. But I thought then that any attempts at reconciliation would have to *begin* there."

We parted early that evening. Michael, an engineer at the Bell Helicopter Company, had a job to go to next morning. Ruth and I had a date to meet at 9:30 A.M. at my hotel room in Dallas.

My driver for the trip back to town was a ruddy, wavy-haired cherub who appeared to be about 18. He looked freshly bathed, garbed and possibly anointed, and he had a spectacular ability to drive facing the back seat. He told me that he was the youngest of 12 children, 11 still alive and all living in Texas.

As we neared the outskirts of town he said, "Have you seen where it happened?"

No need to ask what. "No," I told him.

"I'll show you," he said.

I wanted to see and I didn't want to see.

"Do you know what happened to me two nights before it happened?"

"No," I told him again.

"I was sitting talking with my wife. Suddenly something hit me. 'Honey,' I said, 'the President will never leave Dallas alive.' What I said surprised me as much as it did her, my wife."

Later in the week I told Ruth this.

"There were many who reported the same thing," she said.

"After it happened they said they remembered these premonitions?"

"No, before it happened they had called friends or written letters."

My driver, though he continued to face me, was silent for a while, seeming to muse on the strangeness of that foresight of his. The night was clear, lit by an unclouded moon and the neon glare of a big city. The car drifted as before. Suddenly the locale became familiar, as it is in a dream when you say to yourself, "I have been here before," but can't for a minute remember how or when. Then when I saw the sweeping curve, the overpass, the building to my left as we were inward bound, I remembered when I had been there and why—many, many times on television—the movement of the cars during the actual event, the many times reshowing in order to demonstrate the position of the assassin in the window of the Texas School Book Depository, the trajectory of bullets, the distance needed to travel to reach the safety of the underpass.

"That is where he fell," my driver said. He pointed to our right.

He did not fall there, of course. He fell, he crumpled, into his wife's lap as he sat in the back seat of a moving car. But our memory clings to places. The earth is hallowed or defiled by what happens on it, and we need to say, "There it happened." So, "There he fell."

When we stopped in front of my hotel my driver said, as many cab drivers in the South do at the conclusion of a trip, "It's been a pleasure visiting with you, ma'am."

As I stepped out of the taxi he handed me a card bearing his name and the word "Evangelist." I did not suppose that he was an angel of the Lord, but that card increased my feeling that my trip from Irving to Dallas had been more than routine.

If cards carrying the relevant data on all the citizens of Dallas had been run through an IBM machine geared to select the citizen most likely to give help to a person in trouble, the card of Ruth Paine might well have been selected. Ruth Paine does not like to think of herself as a "do-gooder," though she admits that doing good is a tendency in herself that does raise its ugly head. In the days after the assassination, when officials and newspapermen left her little time for her housework, she employed a colored woman to help her. The colored woman expressed interest in getting advice from a birth-control clinic; so Ruth drove off with her helper to a Dallas birth-control clinic and let the house go hang. This, to my mind, is admirable: persons put before things and others before self. But Ruth was dismayed when she saw the list I made of the work she had done and the organizations to which she had belonged.

"I sound like an activist."

"How else is anything ever accomplished?"

"Don't preach about me. I'm no shining example."

"I'll let your acts speak for you."

Ruth Hyde Paine was born in New York in September, 1932. She was brought up in Columbus, Ohio. Her father is in the insurance business. Her mother, Carol Hyde, is now an ordained minister in the Unitarian Church; she has just completed her work for a Bachelor of Divinity Degree at Oberlin College in preparation for a position as a hospital chaplain.

The first word that came to Ruth's mind in describing herself as a child was "shy." Her happiest times as a young child were times alone, and she found it hard to meet people.

"No one would guess, reading this list I have of what you've done, that you were a shy child."

"Perhaps, because I was shy, I tried harder to make contact than those for whom it comes easily. But the times I remember best were solitary. I remember running with my dog; I remember making a nest in a wheat field; I remember a great field of wild strawberries. I remember wondering about God, and won-

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dering at twelve if there was a God. I remember talking—that is the way it seemed to me then—with God. My parents were Methodists first, then Unitarians."

By the time Ruth was 15, however, she was already involved in Quaker activities. She had attended a Quaker-sponsored World Affairs meeting, joined a teen-age Quaker interracial club, and even taught summer classes in Quaker Bible schools. It was after entering Antioch College in 1949 that she decided formally to become a Quaker. "I was tremendously excited by the idea of the 'inner light' the possibility of direct communication between God and man. Also by the Quaker concern for other people."

In the next few years she was active in the National Quaker Young People's Group, was sent to the Friends World Confrrence at Oxford, attended a Quaker work camp in South Dakota, and in 1953 was chairman for the biennial National Young Friends Conference.

When I asked her whether the official side of Quaker life really appealed to her as much as these activities would indicate, she said: "There were things that needed to be accomplished, and I didn't know how, except through organizations, they *could* be accomplished."

Organizations of this kind were a means of helping people. And Ruth Paine was increasingly concerned about people who needed acceptance and help, especially those who least expected to find it. "I have always been aware of the look on the face of a person who does not expect to be accepted, the look about the mouth of the person who expects defeat. Lee Oswald had this look."

A year after her graduation from Antioch, Ruth met Michael Paine in Philadelphia, where she was a playground director and teacher of folk dancing at the Germantown Friends School.

The Paines came to Irving, to the town and the house where they now live, before the birth of their first child. Ruth chose the house herself; its price, $10,000, tells how modest it is. Their second child was born a little more than a year after the first. Two years after Christopher's birth and for reasons I did not discuss with Ruth, the Paines separated.

When she first met the Oswalds, Ruth Paine was a woman with two small children and separated from her husband; a woman accustomed, until her marriage, to many purposeful meetings with adults. She was undoubtedly lonely, and felt the exclusion from the world and its happenings that many young mothers, their days devoted to young children, feel.

Toward the end of February, 1963, Ruth received an invitation from a Dallas friend to attend a party at which Lee Oswald, a man who had gone to Russia, originally intending to stay, was coming to talk about his experiences.

"How did you happen to be invited?" I asked her.

"I knew the host. We had sung English madrigals together."

The Paines both are singers. Michael sings with a church choir in Dallas now, and before his marriage had toured Europe with a group of American singers. Ruth, on the evening of my first visit with the Paines, had delighted me by singing a cereal commercial as a round with her children.

"The host invited me," Ruth recalled, "because he knew I was interested in learning the Russian language well enough to teach it. Lee Oswald told about his experiences in the Soviet Union, where he met and married Marina. He talked to a clutch of people around him for perhaps an hour, but I missed half of it because I spent time getting acquainted with the kitchen crowd. He talked about the censoring of his mail. He realized after he got home that his brother had sent some letters that never reached him. He said that all mail from foreign countries addressed anywhere in the U.S.S.R. must go first to a Moscow office for reading.

"I wasn't sure as he talked whether he was dissatisfied with the Soviet system or simply wanted to make it clear to his listeners that he was not blind to its defects. He did say that he had gone there because he thought their system superior to ours, and that while there he tried to renounce his citizenship. But our embassy refused to surrender his passport to the Soviet government. If they had, it's doubtful that he could have come back to this country with his wife and their baby.

"I saw little of Marina the first part of the party. She was trying to get June, their one-year-old, to sleep. She explained that she didn't like to leave Junie with a baby sitter. I remember wondering if it was possible that she was expecting a child again, though how it occurred to me, I can't imagine. Perhaps it was because although she said she liked beer, she refused a drink. She had quit smoking when she was expecting June. She always put her children first.

"I got her address and wrote, asking if I could come and visit sometime. I hoped for a chance to practice Russian and thought I might help her with English."

"Why were you so interested in Russian?"

"Not for the reasons I've seen attributed to me by the press—'to forward Soviet-American relations.' Goodness knows, I don't want to do anything to *impair* those relations! But I've always been interested in languages. I think we're handicapped as Americans because we are so limited in our knowledge of the languages of other countries. I'm glad our government is encouraging language study. I think we'd be better off if more of us could communicate with people from other countries more directly."

Marina Oswald wrote back inviting Ruth to visit, and she did, taking her children, Lynn, then three, and Christopher, two.

"We took all three children for a walk in the park near their apartment. Marina was very pleased that her Junie felt comfortable around me. The child was often afraid of strangers, but when I came she took an interest in my children and their toys and hardly noticed me."

On this first visit Ruth found that Marina was expecting a baby in October.

"We visited two or three times after that and began to confide as friends. Marina said that awhile ago her husband had told her he wanted her to go back to the Soviet Union. I didn't know whether this was said in the anger of a quarrel, whether he was really tired of her or whether he simply resented the expenses of a wife. She had written to the Soviet embassy to inquire about going back. When they wrote to ask why, she didn't answer. She dropped the subject. She liked the United States, she told me, and she hoped to learn enough English to become part of the life here—to get a job."

Ruth felt sorry for Marina Oswald. She struck Ruth as a person of pride, capability and sensitivity. It seemed unfair to her that the girl be made to return to the Soviet Union simply because she had no alternative. Oswald meanwhile had lost his job in a photoengraving shop in Dallas. Marina suggested to her husband that he look for a job in New Orleans, the city where he was born.

Ruth arrived at the Oswalds' apartment in late April for what she thought would be another visit with Marina similar to the previous ones. She found Oswald packed to go to New Orleans. He had informed Marina that she was to wait at the Dallas apartment until he found a job and a place to live.

"I suggested that instead of waiting there she come and stay at my house, where Lee could phone when he had word."

Ruth also offered to drive Oswald's family the 500 miles between Dallas and New Orleans in her 1955 Chevrolet station wagon to rejoin him when he found a job. She suggested this, she says, because she thought the bus trip would be difficult for a pregnant woman with a small child. The thought that a thousand-mile trip in an old car, the first half of the trip with three small children and a pregnant woman, would be difficult for her seems not to have occurred to Ruth Paine.

"Did Oswald ever make any contribution toward the support of his family while they were with you?"

"That April he left some money with Marina, which she put toward groceries and incidentals. It was used up before the two-week stay was over. In the fall when Marina was with me, he gave her no money I can recall except ten dollars to pay for some new shoes for her."

"Was Marina helpful?"

"Very. She worked hard around the house. I only wished my Russian were better so we could talk more freely. She'd have to explain her jokes, even though she got mine easily enough. One day Chris and June were squabbling over a toy and I commented: 'Soviet-American cultural exchange.' She laughed and said, 'Don't say it!' I don't think I was ever able to convince her how valuable it was to me to have a resident nonpaid tutor. She was never comfortable accepting bed and board of me."

On May 9th, Lee Oswald called to say that he had a job and had rented an apartment. So with her station wagon loaded with Oswald belongings, Ruth Paine set out for New Orleans.

The apartment Oswald had obtained was on Magazine Street, old, ugly and full of cockroaches. The Oswalds quarreled—about petty things, it seemed to Ruth—for the two days she was there, and she was glad to turn homeward.

Back in Irving, Ruth had a letter from Marina saying that she might yet be

sent back to Russia. Ruth got the name of a fellow Quaker in New Orleans and asked her to look in on the Oswalds. But the Oswalds' relationship bettered and Marina wrote that all was well.

In August, Ruth drove East on vacation. On her way back to Irving, in September, she stopped in New Orleans. Lee Oswald had by this time lost his New Orleans job.

Ruth suggested that Marina come to Texas, where she qualified as a one-year resident and could receive hospital care adjusted to her husband's ability to pay. She invited Marina to stay at her house for a month before and after the baby's birth.

Oswald appeared relieved to have the problem of his wife's care before and during her confinement solved. He told Ruth that he was going to Houston to look for a job. Instead, as she learned after the assassination, he went to Mexico and tried to get a visa for a trip to Cuba—whether long or short, no one can now say.

Until after the assassination, Ruth believed that Lee Oswald deceived both Marina and herself about the trip to Mexico. Now she is not positive how much knowledge of the trip Marina had. Some time after October 4th, when Oswald had called the Paine home to say that he was in Dallas, that he had found a room there and was looking for work, he asked to use Michael Paine's drill press in the garage. He wanted to bore a hole in a coin so that Marina could wear it on a chain around her neck. After the assassination, when officers of the law gathered up many of the Oswald effects left in the Paine home, Ruth saw what it was that Lee Oswald had drilled—a Mexican peso.

On October 4th, about two weeks before Marina's baby was due, Oswald phoned, talked to Marina and asked her whether Ruth could pick him up in downtown Dallas. Ruth heard Marina tell her husband that this would be impossible, that Ruth had just returned from the Parkland Hospital, where she had given one of the two pints of blood asked for by doctors from the friends of maternity patients. Marina was receiving prenatal care there; and there, where John Kennedy and Lee Oswald both were to die, Ruth Paine had been donating blood in behalf of Oswald's wife. So Oswald had to hitchhike that day to the Paine home.

Hitchhiking was easy for Lee Oswald, Ruth said. He was clean, slightly built and could probably be taken for a college student. On the afternoon of October 4th a kind driver delivered him, after Oswald had told the driver of his two weeks' separation from wife and child, to the Paine door. Oswald came out regularly each weekend from that first one until the weekend of November 9th to 11th.

I did not get a very vivid picture of Lee Oswald from Ruth. This may be in part a result of the fact that he wasn't a vivid person, in part a result of the fact that it was painful for Ruth Paine to think about him. She was, I could not help seeing, a much more worn and depressed person at the end of our week's talks than she had been singing rounds on the night I first met her.

"Did Oswald talk? Was he a talker?"

"No. Not to me, at least. He didn't like to talk English with me. If I'd start in English, he'd answer in Russian."

"Did he ever talk politics with you?"

"No. I never did try to communicate ideologically, and besides, I couldn't in Russian. I made no special effort to be kind to Lee or to sympathize with him. I did try to teach him to drive, and I think he appreciated this. He could see that there was no self-interest in this."

"What self-interest did he think there was in your taking care of his wife and child, driving twice between New Orleans and Dallas, taking her to the hospital, giving [illegible]ur blood for her?"

"Lee understood how hard it is to l[illegible] Russian and how useful it was to [illegible] someone speaking it to me in the house."

"Did he ever offer [illegible]lp?"

"He planed the front [illegible] once when it stuck."

"Did he offer to pay for groceries?"

"Not when he was my guest, but he did when I was his guest in New Orleans. And then when I had to buy a new tire before I could start home, I thought he looked embarrassed not to be able to make some contribution."

"Was he nice to Marina?"

"I didn't think so. He didn't like her to have any independence. He didn't seem to want her to learn English. If she was getting the better of him in an argument in Russian, he told her to shut up."

"I don't see how you put up with him."

"Once human ties were formed and I loved and cared for Marina, I couldn't say to her, 'Be thus and so or I'll wash my hands of you.' Lee was her husband. I couldn't say, 'Get rid of your husband.' I never saw him hit her, though, as I read in the press some people had reported. I never saw him violent in any way. His words were sharp sometimes, but I took this as a sign that he got out petty grievances and irritations with his wife and didn't let them build up to explosion size."

When Lee Oswald returned to Dallas from Mexico he did not have a job, but he was still getting unemployment compensation. By October 12th, however, he had received his last check.

"Had he been looking for work while he was receiving this money?" I asked Ruth.

"Yes, after he got back to Dallas he had been looking. But by the end of the first week he had no job, only his final unemployment check. The baby was due any day, and with no money and no prospect of any I think he felt pretty desperate. He got his job at the School Book Depository by chance. On Monday, October fourteenth, Marina and I were having coffee with a neighbor. We were saying that Lee had been unable to find work, and another neighbor who had stopped in said that she had a brother working at the Texas School Book Depository and that she thought there might be an opening there. When Lee called the house that evening we told him of this possibility. He applied and was accepted. Mr. Truly, the man who employed Lee, had two openings, one in a warehouse near Stemmon's Expressway, one in the Depository building on Elm Street. Again chance entered, and Mr. Truly gave Lee the job at the Elm Street location."

"How did you find out that Oswald had the job?"

"He phoned immediately to say he was to start in the morning. He was grateful and elated. He came out on Friday, October eighteenth, and we celebrated his new job and his twenty-fourth birthday."

On Sunday, October 20th, Marina Oswald's second child, Rachel, was born. Ruth Paine took her to the hospital.

"When I left her going into the labor room, she asked me to pray for her."

"You weren't able to get in touch with Oswald?"

"He was at my house that weekend. He had given us the telephone number of his rooming house in Dallas so we could reach him with the news if Marina went to the hospital. But we didn't need to use it."

"You never used it, then?"

"Only once later. It was Sunday, November seventeenth. Junie had been playing with the telephone dial and Marina got the idea of phoning Lee. She asked me to call the number he had given us. I dialed and asked for Lee Oswald. I was told no Lee Oswald lived there. I asked if I had reached the right number and if this was a rooming house. The answers were yes. I hung up in bewilderment.

"Next day Lee phoned Marina, bawled her out for having called him and told her he was living there under a different name."

"How did Marina feel about that?"

"She was very upset. She said it wasn't the first time that she had been caught 'between two fires'—between loyalty to her husband and her own conviction of what was right."

"What did you think when you learned he was using a false name?"

"By then I'd begun to think that Lee had a liking for deception for its own sake. I also supposed he was doing it in order that the people at the School Book Depository wouldn't find out that he had a Russian wife. He asked the man he rode to work with not to let people at work

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know that his wife was Russian. He was afraid, I'm sure, that if this were known, it would come out that he had tried to defect, and that this might cause him to lose his job. He didn't want me to let the people at Parkland Hospital know when he had got a job. He was unwilling at first even to go there to see his wife after the birth of their second child."

"Did you tell the hospital that he was employed?"

"Yes. I didn't try to preach to Lee about right or wrong. I simply told him that I was the kind of person who had never been able to lie and that I didn't think I'd better begin trying to be now."

"Did he think that the hospital might cut off the help it was giving him if it was known he was employed?"

"Yes, I believe he thought that. It was after I told him the hospital already knew he was working that he agreed to go and see Marina at Parkland."

It was on November 1st, ten days after Marina returned from the hospital, that an agent of the FBI came to Ruth Paine's home. He came, Ruth feels, to encourage Marina's confidence in the FBI.

"He told her she could appeal to them for help if she received blackmail threats from Russia. I learned later that the FBI routinely offers protection of this sort to *emigrés* from Iron Curtain countries about a year after they have come to America. My respect for the FBI, which was already great, went up after that visit. We discussed the difficulty in a free society of politely watching people with queer, possibly dangerous ideas. Unlike a congressional committee, the FBI never makes their suspicions of an individual public until they have evidence that will stand up in court."

The agent also asked Ruth and Marina for Oswald's working address, which they gave him, and for his home address in Dallas, which they did not have.

"Did you give him Oswald's phone number?"

"No."

"Why not? Were you trying to protect him?"

"Of course not. I took it for granted that the FBI knew all about him and should know all about him, and that Lee, having tried to renounce his citizenship, would have to expect and to live with FBI checking the rest of his life. It didn't occur to me that the telephone number would help them. I wish now it had. Frankly, I thought they must know where he was staying. After the FBI visit I gave Lee the FBI man's name and phone number so that Lee could get in touch with them. He told me he had tried to do so, but it was not until weeks after the assassination that I found out from the FBI that he had lied about this also."

"Did you ever feel that Oswald was really dangerous?"

"I didn't care for him. I thought he was an inflexible, dogmatic oddball. But I never thought of him as dangerous. I have children to think about. I wouldn't have invited his wife to stay with me if I *had* thought he was dangerous."

Oswald spent three days instead of the usual two, during the Veterans Day weekend, at the Paines'. Marina herself appeared to feel that he had overstayed his welcome this time, and asked him not to return the next weekend. It was during this absence that the two women discovered through their phone call that Oswald was living under an assumed name. His return call was on Monday, November 18th. On Tuesday and Wednesday, November 19th and 20th, Oswald did not phone Marina as he usually did on weekday evenings.

"He thinks he is punishing me," Marina said.

But on Thursday evening, November 21st, when Ruth returned home from shopping for groceries, she found Oswald, just arrived from Dallas, standing on her lawn. He had ridden out with the brother of the woman who had suggested there might be work at the School Book Depository. This was the first time Oswald had ever come without first asking Ruth if a visit would be all right. Marina told Ruth privately that she was sorry that Lee had not asked permission, but both women thought that this unscheduled visit was to make up for his anger about the phone call.

"How did he appear?"

"Just as usual. After we had gone inside, I remember, I spoke to him about my excitement and pleasure at the prospect of the President's visit next day."

"What was his response to this?"

"He just said, 'Uh, yeah' and walked past me into the kitchen."

"There was nothing whatsoever to mark this visit from any other?"

"No. He ate supper as usual. I did notice one thing, though. He had been to the garage that evening. I put the children to bed, and after I had done that, I went to the garage to paint some blocks for the children. I noticed that he had been there and had left the light on."

"Did you have any idea he had a gun in the garage?"

"No. They had a lot of their stuff stored there. Books. Household things. Michael had moved that gun, wrapped in an old blanket, out of his way more than once. Of course, he didn't know it was a gun."

"Didn't he feel it to find out what it was?"

"You don't go prying into your guests' belongings."

"What would you have done if you had discovered that Oswald had a gun?"

"It's legal to own a gun in Texas. Lots of men hunt in Texas."

After some further thought Ruth added, "I think, if I had discovered the gun, I would have asked him *not* to keep it at our place. It was legal for him to have it, but I had a right, since I don't like the use of firearms, to tell him to keep it elsewhere."

"Except for the light in the garage there was nothing unusual in your memory of the evening?"

"No. Lee went to bed earlier than Marina and I. We sat up talking together for some time. But Lee did something unusual that night or the next morning which I didn't learn about until later. He took off his wedding ring and put it into a little china cup that had belonged to Marina's grandmother."

"How did you find out about this?"

"After the assassination, the FBI came to the house to look for the ring, which was missing from Lee's finger. We found it in the cup in Marina's bedroom."

When Ruth awakened on the morning of November 22nd it was seven thirty, and the house was so quiet she was afraid Oswald had overslept and missed his ride to work. When she went to the kitchen she saw the empty coffee cup, which told her that Oswald was up and gone. She then turned on her television so that she could see the Kennedys in Fort Worth and Dallas. She left the set on for Marina when she went with her daughter Lynn for an early dentist's appointment. Marina was watching when she got home.

"She thanked me for leaving the TV on. She had nursed Rachel about six thirty while Lee dressed for work, she said, and then gone back to sleep. Next time she woke up she was feeling tired, but the thrill and excitement of watching Kennedy's arrival at the Dallas airport had made her feel better."

The two women were together on the living-room sofa watching television when the announcement was made of the shooting. Lunch was on the table but it was forgotten. Ruth lighted some plain candles and Marina asked her if that was a way of praying. Ruth told her it was one way. When the word came that President Kennedy had died, the two women grieved together.

"Marina said," Ruth told me, " 'What a terrible thing this is for Mrs. Kennedy! How sad it is that her children will have to grow up without a father!' "

The two women were still in front of the television set when six men arrived from the sheriff's office and the police department with the news that Lee Oswald was in their custody, charged with the murder of police officer J. D. Tippit. They wanted to search the house, and although Ruth, with her Civil Liberties training, knew that they should have a warrant, she told them they could search.

Love

A fresh flower,
A pressed bouquet,
A yellow bird
In a gilt cage,
A book bestowed
With one marked page,
A hug, a kiss,
A frown, a sigh,
A word, a jewel,
An apple pie,
A cinnamon candy,
A crystal heart—

Light-years
And a long art.

by Mia Howard

Their first question was, "Did Lee Oswald own any guns?"

Ruth translated the question to Marina, and to her horror Marina answered yes. She said that she had known Lee had a rifle and that a couple of weeks ago she had seen the butt of a rifle wrapped up in a blanket on the garage floor.

"I translated Marina's answer to the officers. I felt sure that the rifle must still be there. But when the officers picked up the blanket roll, it hung limp. Whatever it had held was gone. It was at that moment that it came to me that Lee Oswald was probably the man who had killed the President, and I was filled with great anger."

"Anger?"

"I was angry because of his terrible deed and because he had made use of my home and had gone from it to kill a man I honored. Any man would have been bad enough. But John Kennedy! I didn't want to leave a stick unturned in my house or elsewhere in finding how and why this was done."

The police filled two car trunks with the possessions of the Paines and the Oswalds. And after getting a baby sitter the two women got into the police cars and were driven off to the police station.

On this trip into town one of the officers in the front seat of the car turned around and asked Ruth a question. It was a question I also had asked her early in my talks.

"Are you or have you been a Communist?"

Ruth told the officer, "No, I am not. And I don't feel the need of taking the Fifth Amendment, either."

The officer, hearing this, smiled and turned around.

At the police station Ruth was relieved to find they had a Russian translator. Anger, shock and grief had made it difficult for her to translate for Marina. The police asked her why Oswald had spent only weekends at her home. Her answer was that he had not been invited to spend more time there. My question was the opposite. Why hadn't Marina and her baby gone to Dallas to spend the weekends with Oswald?

"In one room?" Ruth asked.

This did not seem so great a hardship to me as having the entire Oswald family, and Oswald's presence—in Ruth's own words a "definite strain"—in the four rooms of the Paine home. But putting her own comfort first was not a habit with Ruth Paine.

"How did Marina react? Did she cry?"

"No. She was very quiet, ashen in color. On the way to the police station she had asked me if the penalty for killing wasn't the electric chair. I said it was.

"At the police station I made a statement to the police which they typed up and had me sign. They got impatient with me when I wanted to correct some of the grammatical mistakes in the typescript."

Mrs. Oswald, Lee's mother, came to the police station while they were there. She was a practical nurse in Fort Worth, and had heard about Lee's arrest on her car radio. Oswald had not wanted his mother to know where he lived; and had not let Marina, who wanted to send her mother-in-law the news of the birth of their second child, know where his mother lived. Mrs. Oswald, after the questioning at the police headquarters was over, went home with Ruth and Marina and spent the night on the sofa in the Paine living room.

Ruth Paine's position was now painful on several counts. "I was grief-stricken by the death of the President. I thought he was doing a remarkable job. There had never been a death in my immediate family. No one I cared about so much had ever died before. I felt it personally, not just as a citizen. Then my sorrow was offended, was soiled, by this association with the assassin, with anger and horror that the man who killed the President had left my house to fire that shot.

"But I could not give way to my grief in a way that would have eased me. For three weeks newspapermen were constantly at the house. I had to think of my children, to try to keep up for their sake some semblance of normal living. After the children were in bed I would take out the newspapers that had piled up and that I hadn't had time for, or the strength for, during the day. I would begin to read; but I would always have to give up. I couldn't read for crying."

"What was Marina's attitude that night?"

"It's hard to remember, exactly. We didn't get back from the police station until about nine thirty. We had had no lunch. We ate some hamburgers and put the children to bed. By this time we knew that Lee was suspected of having killed the President as well as Officer Tippit. Marina said that she did not feel that Lee had had anything against President Kennedy, that Lee had translated statements about and by Kennedy to her from the papers and magazines and that he had never criticized the President to her."

The next day Marina Oswald and Lee Oswald's mother left Ruth's house for Dallas. They saw Oswald that noon.

Later the same day, Ruth Paine had some phone calls from Oswald himself. The first phone call came around 4 P.M. She was thunderstruck to hear his voice.

I asked Ruth what she had said. "Did you ask him whether he had done the terrible things of which he was accused?"

"No."

"Why?"

"I think I believed he *had* done them."

"What was said?"

"He said, 'This is Lee.' I answered, 'Well, hi.' His reply was, 'Ah, yeh.'"

"Shamefaced? Guilty?"

"No. About as usual. More in the manner of a boy who thinks if he believes the lie he is telling, others will believe him too."

"What did he want?"

"He wanted me to call a lawyer named Abt. I had heard on television that he wanted a New York lawyer, John Abt, to represent him. I resented Lee's asking me to do anything for him at that point, but I believed he had a right to counsel, so I told him I'd try the phone numbers he gave me for this lawyer. I did call, but wasn't able to get Mr. Abt. About nine o'clock Lee phoned again. This conversation opened in Russian and he asked for Marina. I told him she was not with me but that I thought I knew where I could reach her. He asked me if I would try to get in touch with her and if I would tell her that he wanted her to return to my place."

"Why did he want this?"

"Simply because she would be more available to him if he wanted to talk with her. This is what I think, anyway."

"Did you get her?"

"When I phoned the motel where I thought they might be staying, Mrs. Marguerite Oswald answered."

"What did she say?"

"The gist of it was that she thought it would be better for Lee not to know where they were and that there were other things to think of than Lee's convenience."

Ruth Paine did not speak with Lee Oswald again. On Sunday she, with much of the rest of the nation, saw Jack Ruby shoot and kill him.

"How did you feel when this happened?"

"I was glad."

Nothing Ruth Paine had said had amazed me as much as this. I couldn't believe my ears.

"There goes your halo," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"You were afraid that I was going to present you as a saintly Quaker. There is nothing remotely saintly or even Quakerish about being glad that one man has murdered another man. Were you glad because you had been angry with Oswald?"

"No, that had nothing to do with it. I thought that Lee's death this way would be so much easier for Marina."

"Surely you couldn't put *that* in the balance against murder? Against due process of law? Against this added proof to others and to ourselves that we are a lawless, violent people?"

COMMISSION EXHIBIT NO. 1439—Continued

"I wasn't glad Jack Ruby killed him. I was just glad it was over. I was glad he was dead."

"Of course, it was the easiest way out for Lee Oswald."

"I wasn't thinking of an easy way out for Lee Oswald. And I don't believe that we live our lives in time only. Only Lee Oswald's life *in time* was finished with that shot. Since then I've regretted the fact that his death has prevented our ever knowing what he might have told."

Perhaps it was unfeeling of me to harry Ruth about her reaction to Oswald's death. But her use of the word "glad" was so contradictory to everything she had worked for and believed in, in the past, that I wanted to try to understand it. She was a woman who was opposed to violence, to killing, to capital punishment.

A very honest woman, Ruth Paine didn't try to justify her reaction.

"In the past few years," she said, "I have thought a lot about killing and violence. I have come to think of right and wrong in terms of what helps the individual soul and what harms it. I don't like blanket statements. I prefer to base all judgments upon the individual case. I don't see right or wrong in absolute or general terms. It's far too complicated a matter."

"Did you go to his funeral?"

If Ruth's "gladness" had shocked me, this question shocked her.

"Go to his funeral? It would have been an affront to my sorrow! Go to mourn the man who had killed the President?"

Then after a pause she said, "I didn't know about it." And after a longer pause, "I've learned since that there was no one there to translate for Marina. If she had asked me to go, if my presence there would have helped her, I would have gone. I couldn't help John Kennedy by staying away."

But she wasn't at the funeral. Mail, checks and gifts began to arrive for Marina, and these Ruth delivered to the Secret Service via the local police. She also sent notes in Russian to Marina.

"Did you hear from her?"

"I had a note from her at Christmas. She thanked me again for everything and said how sorry she was things had ended so badly. She asked me to write, which I did."

Ruth also sent Marina two books.

"When Marina was with me, she had sometimes read to me from two books she had in Russian on child care. It occurred to me that she might like to have these books with her."

"How did the police happen to miss them when they gathered up the Oswald belongings? Two books in Russian?"

Ruth laughed. "I don't know. They gathered up my folk-dance records and left behind the books in Russian. Anyway, that's what they did. So I took the books down to the police station to be sent on to Marina. I thought she might need them. She referred to them all the time. I remember her quoting to me from one of the books: 'Nursing is the baby's right and the mother's pride.'"

"Did you ever hear from her about them?"

"A day or so after I had left them at the Irving police station, two Secret Service men called on me. One of them spoke Russian. They said that something very important had happened and showed me a note, or at least several pages of writing. The page they showed me had no salutation at the top. The Russian-speaking Secret Service man talked to me in Russian. I think he wanted to test my skill in the language. Then he asked me if I had ever seen this particular piece of writing and if I could identify the handwriting.

"The writing was in Russian and I wasn't given the page to read, but simply to look at. I said that I had never seen that piece of writing before and that I did not recognize the handwriting. I had been able to read the first sentence of the page shown me. The sentence was, 'This key is for the post-office box,' and whoever had written the sentence had used the English word for key, putting it into Russian letters.

"The translator said to me, 'Mrs. Paine, we know that you sent this note to Marina.'

"I said, 'You know more than I do.'

"The translator then told me, 'Mrs. Paine, it will be best for you to be as frank and honest as possible.'

"I told him that I was honest at all times and that I was being honest then. Up to then I had no idea where the note had come from. After that the conversation moved into English, and I learned from the other Secret Service man that the note had been found in a book. I then remembered the two Russian child-care books I had sent Marina and supposed that the note had been found in one of them. When the Russian translator and I had discussed the writer's failure to use the Russian word for key, I told him, 'The writer should have used *Ekluch*.'"

"Do you think this was what convinced them that you didn't write the note?"

"I don't think they believed at any time that I had *written* it. I asked the Secret Service men if they believed the note to be current. They replied that they didn't know."

Late in December, Ruth read an article in the *Houston Chronicle* concerning a note Oswald had written to Marina just before his attack on General Walker, telling her what she should do if he was arrested.

"I recognized in it the sentence I had read in the note shown me by the Secret Service man. Marina's business manager told the press that when Oswald came home on the evening of April tenth and confessed to Marina that he had tried to shoot General Walker, she threatened to show this note to the police if ever he showed signs of doing such a thing again."

"Do you think Marina really believed that her threat to Oswald to show it to the police would prevent him from making any more such attacks?"

"Yes. This may not seem realistic, but she was very young, in a foreign country, not knowing the language, and facing, without the help one would expect from a husband, terrible decisions and events.

"She was quite without counsel. Her religious views were like a tender green shoot. Only since the death of her mother had she come to believe there was a God. She had no faith to help her in the absence of a personal counselor. I've heard that she has recently been attending church. These happenings may have created a major crisis in her religious thinking."

"Will your experience with the Oswalds make you more wary in dealing with other people?"

"I don't think so. I don't want to be mechanical and programed in my responses to people. Not every impulse to respond can be analyzed. There are results that we simply can't see or anticipate. Life is a chance-taking enterprise. When you stop taking chances, you stop living."

I asked a cruel question. "Do you think it possible that by relieving Lee Oswald of expenses, by giving him time, a storage place for his gun, you made it easier for him . . . to do what he did?"

"I have gone over and over that in my mind. I think the chances involved were beyond anybody's anticipating."

"Of course, we can never know whether or not what you did might not at some moment almost have counterbalanced Oswald's determination to kill."

"I expect it was too late in Lee Oswald's life for him to be changed fundamentally by what anyone did—or didn't do."

"What if Lee Oswald and his mother had, from the beginning of their lives, experienced the kind of loving kindness you offered the Oswalds?"

"Who can say? Of course, I think we'd all be better if what we gave and what we received was, from the beginning, love, trust, openness."

I asked Ruth Paine only one question on the day I said good-by to her.

"Would you do it all over again? In spite of the sufferings, the interruption of your life, the misery, the publicity?"

She was silent for an instant and then she rephrased my question.

"Would I open my home again to a woman I liked, a woman who needed friendship and a place to live? Yes. But the 'if onlys' do plague me, of course. They probably always will. *If only* I had known that Lee Oswald had hidden a rifle in my garage. *If only* I had realized that this man was capable of such an act. If only quite by accident I had or had not done a dozen things. But then, suppose I had *not* answered the prompting of my heart, had not invited Marina to stay with me, and, that Lee had killed the President anyway. Wouldn't the 'if onlys' have been much worse?" THE END

A Baby Is Born

The hand, the tiny foot, the breath,
the body, soft and sweet, to bring
up from a stillness deep as death—
to clap and dance and laugh and sing,
and, so, extend the ecstasy,
the joy of all that made him be!

by Helen Harrington