

# My experience with Lee Harvey Oswald

By Michael Paine 2013 edited by son, Chris

In 1962 I was living in Irving Texas, where I worked at Bell Helicopter, and sang in the Unitarian Church choir in Dallas. Another couple in that church were from Philadelphia where we had sung madrigals together, and they knew from that social contact that I thought the economic system we had in this country worked very poorly. They asked me one day whether I would be interested to meet a Marine who had defected to the Soviet Union, became disenchanted with the USSR, and had returned to the US. I said, yes, I would. They invited me to a party in late February 1963, to meet him. I had a bad cold the night of the party and couldn't go, but my wife, Ruth, did go. Lee was there with his Russian wife Marina. Ruth wasn't much taken with Lee but she had a nice time with Marina. Ruth is a Quaker and had been a member of a Friends (Quaker) East-West Contacts group which was trying to promote more contacts between ordinary non-governmental American and Soviet citizens. Ruth realized she would be much more useful to that group if she knew Russian, and so began studying Russian. When she met Marina, who could hardly understand or speak any English, since Lee spoke to her only in Russian, Ruth was pleased to discover her Russian was good enough to be able to communicate with Marina in Russian.

A few weeks later Ruth suggested we invite them over for supper so I could meet them. Lee didn't have a car (and didn't even know how to drive! ) so I drove over to Oak Cliff to pick them up. I parked the car near their address and noticed as I was crossing the street that the clapboards on the building I was heading for were unusually close together, which is common in New England but not in Texas. Lee's apartment was on the second floor. He buzzed the front door open for me and waited at the top of the stairway with his little family. I went up the stairs where he introduced me to his wife, Marina, and daughter, June. Marina withdrew shortly to collect things she would want to take to our house. On a small table there at the top of the stairs was a glossy 8" by 10" black and white photo of himself which he must have placed there to show me when I arrived. He picked it up and handed it to me as he led me to the living room at the back of the house where we sat together on the sofa. In the photo he was dressed smartly in a black shirt and trousers and perhaps slender black boots, holding a rifle in front of his chest with its barrel angled up to his left shoulder. His left hand clasped the rifle and two oblong white objects were at right angles to the barrel. I couldn't make out what they were. He told me they were the two newspapers he subscribed to, "The Militant" and "The Worker", I believe. In the photo he was standing near a building with narrow clapboards near his left elbow and I realized the photo was very likely taken right below where we were now sitting. I remember that question was in my mind but I didn't ask him because it seemed too irrelevant. The more significant question was what did the picture mean to him?

I was a bit taken aback during this first meeting with Lee. I had expected

him to be someone interested in different forms of socialist government, a young intellectual who would like to talk about the details of an ideal society. When he handed me that photo of himself, of which he was evidently very proud, I couldn't think of much to say about it. I did think the photo probably presented an accurate image of how he viewed himself and wanted to be viewed by others. He looked like an agile, able-bodied political activist, confident, and ready to join any armed rebellion. It made me think of Che Guevara, which I'm sure would have greatly delighted Lee. I asked him how he managed to live in Russia and how he made a living there. He told me he was given an apartment and a job in a factory. I don't now remember what his job was, but I remember thinking to myself that Russia had treated him surprisingly well. I surmised that the Soviet Union was concerned that any news reports of Lee which appeared in the U.S. would convey a picture of the Soviet Union being a very benign and worker-friendly state. I asked why had he returned to the US, and with some disgust and contempt in his voice, he said you couldn't own a rifle in the Soviet Union unless you were part of a paramilitary club. He seemed to consider it a rather major and inexcusable restriction of freedom for a citizen to not be able to own a rifle in the USSR. That answer lowered my estimation of the depth of his interest in socialism.

Marina was taking longer than expected readying herself, and several times he shouted angrily at her, in Russian, to hurry up. I could not understand what he was actually saying but his tone of voice was cruel. I tried to assure him there was no urgent hurry to get home but my words did not induce him to speak any more gently to Marina.

We got back to Irving, where Ruth had prepared a delicious meal of deep dish lasagna and salad. At the meal I asked him what he was doing these days to advance his marxist interests. He told us that he was trying to observe right wing groups in this country. He didn't seem fully at ease to talk about it and, wishing to set him at ease, I told him I was doing a somewhat similar thing. I had been going to meetings in Dallas put on by the John Birch society which were held in huge and no doubt expensive halls, led by nattily dressed, crew cut, athletic young men telling the audience of the danger of communism taking over the world. My purpose was a desire to understand why two populations, let's say John Birchers on the right and liberals on the left, as I considered myself to be, both of which groups strongly support the Right of Free Speech, but have such widely differing values in other respects.

I happened to mention General Edwin A. Walker who lived in Dallas and was frequently presented in the news media or TV for his staunch conservative point of view when that was needed for news "balance". When I mentioned his name Lee smiled a very peculiar smile. I wondered "what was that all about?" I certainly was curious but I didn't want to launch into subjects where we might encounter important differences of opinions, so I didn't ask him. I wanted to keep the evening pleasant. (I can't now think of what "differences of opinion" I might have been concerned about.)

It came to pass however, I think only a week or two after our meal, that someone shot at General Walker in his house. As I remember it, the newspaper

said Walker had reached for a paper on the floor the same instant the shot came through the window. I realized the assailant might have thought he had been successful in hitting his target until he heard otherwise in the news. That summer I watched the news for the results of the investigation, which surely must have happened, but it was not until a week or two after JFK's assassination that the full story [involving Lee] was discovered.

Ruth and I were quietly separating. I had a separate apartment which I used frequently, and therefore Ruth had a somewhat empty house. So some time after our meal with the Oswalds Ruth asked me if I thought it would be unsafe for her to invite Marina to live with her. Would Lee be a danger? I thought about it and didn't see danger in it. My biggest quarrel with Lee was that he was not wanting Marina to learn English. I supposed he wanted this so that she would remain dependent upon him and would continue to be his obedient servant, which seemed to me to be particularly inappropriate for someone with Marxist values which decry the domination of man by man. However, if Marina lived with Ruth she would learn English and Ruth would learn Russian; a win win situation, and I would not have to poke Lee about the matter. Lee would be considerably relieved of monetary support for Marina, and the costs for Ruth or me would be small, perhaps negative because Ruth would then pay less for babysitting and probably nothing for outside Russian tutoring. She would also have the company of another woman with two young children, for Marina was pregnant and soon to give birth to Rachel.

Ruth did ask Marina to live with her and I think it turned out as I imagined it would. It seemed to me that Lee, who was allowed to stay on weekends, was nicer to Marina in our house than he was when they were alone in their own apartment, and with no other burdens on him it was easy for him to practice being a daddy as he played with his daughter. I didn't think that came very naturally to him, but he did seem to enjoy doing it.

One time I asked Lee what his socialist papers meant to him.. He replied that he could "read between the lines and tell what they wanted him to do". When I heard him say that I thought to myself, he doesn't have any friends or group that he communicates with. I should take him to a meeting of the ACLU where he would meet people who wouldn't immediately pick a fight with him when he said he supported Castro. I asked him to show me how he "read between the lines". He chose a paper, I don't remember which one it was and we spread it across our knees for him to show me an example. He didn't succeed, but I didn't doubt that he meant what he had said. I was also very curious about who "they" were but I believed he would have as much difficulty coming up with an actual "they" as he had nailing down an actual "what they wanted" so I didn't ask him; I didn't want to embarrass him or get him frustrated with me. I did notice in the paper we were looking at the name David Rockefeller appeared frequently, and thought he might have been among the 'they' who were the evil Capitalists in that newspaper.

Lee didn't have a high regard for democracy. He thought the average American citizen had been hoodwinked with regard to democracy. He thought

there was actually a small, powerful, secret, undisclosed cabal of capitalists who controlled and ran the country. When I asked him to name one of those capitalists the only name he came up with was that of David Rockefeller.

At some point I did take him to an ACLU meeting, where, after the presentation, I saw him in a cluster of people who seemed to be interested in what he had to say. I didn't listen to what was being said, my only concern was that he was not being objectionable. Going home in the car that evening, I asked him if he thought he might join the ACLU. He was silent for quite a while before he answered "no he couldn't join an organization that would defend free speech for someone like Edwin Walker." I believe later he did join the ACLU. After the assassination of JFK he called our house from the police station and asked me to try to get a hold of John Abt for him, a lawyer for the ACLU who handled unpopular cases. I was deeply disgusted and angry with him that he had killed my favorite president and I had no desire to accede to his wishes, especially since he was not being imprisoned for anything having to do with civil rights, so I just handed the phone to Ruth to let her do what she pleased with the call. I felt, with a heavy heart, Lee was just incapable of perceiving or understanding how remarkable a man Kennedy was. Lee had not even been guided by sensible political considerations, his motivation could only have been to do something big that would bring national prominence to him and a place in history.

I may have had only about three discussions with Lee touching on politics. In one of them I was trying to persuade Lee there was some merit to democracy. I cited as an example the governance of the Unitarian Church where the people constituting the congregation ultimately hold all the power, and each member of the congregation has one vote etc. He put an end to my Unitarian Church example by dismissing the usefulness of any idea coming from a religious source by reminding me that "religion was the opiate of the people". I presumed he must have thought the opiate (religion) was itself devised by capitalists for their own purposes to manipulate people. His demeanor and tone of voice told me he thought I was stupid not to see how I was being duped by religion and had been taken in by the sweet-talk of capitalists.

Another time in referring to government he emphatically declared that "change only comes through violence". I'd also heard him say that President Kennedy was the best president he had had in his lifetime. Looking back on what happened, these two statements seem impossibly contradictory... how could a man want to kill a president whom he thought was the best president he'd had in his lifetime? I didn't doubt that Oswald could kill someone, but he was much more concerned about politics than people. This concern about politics was evidenced by his trips to Russia (where he met his wife Marina) and when he went to the Russian embassy in Mexico during the summer of '63, trying to get a visa in order to get to Cuba which had become his favorite example of socialist governance. This was also a time in his life when he was feeling deeply frustrated and unappreciated. He viewed himself as an important person, and his thoughts and actions were not being recognized. I think he wanted to be significant in history.

Jumping ahead to that fateful day of November 22, 1963, Frank Krystinick, a co-worker, and I were seated for lunch in a bowling alley near the lab where we worked. Kennedy was coming from Fort Worth to Dallas, and the sense of danger was thick in the air. I was afraid of a right wing attack on Kennedy. Our whole conversation, both before and during the meal, was about previous presidential assassinations in this country. Although he had been received well in Fort Worth, Dallas was not a friendly place for JFK. The John Birch Society, fairly new and rapidly growing, was vehemently opposed to his policies.

Midway through the meal a waitress came to our table to tell us Kennedy had been shot. We left immediately to get back to the lab where we could listen to the radio. When we heard it had occurred in front of the Texas Book Depository building Frank began urging me to call the FBI to tell them Lee Oswald worked there. I refused, saying everybody will be jumping on him because he is a black sheep due to his frequent assertion that he was a Marxist.

It was my strong impression that Lee was guided primarily by political considerations. It didn't make political sense to me that Lee would kill Kennedy when he knew well enough that Vice President Johnson would take his place. I thought Kennedy was more of a liberal than Johnson. Also, I knew that the FBI knew Oswald worked at the book depository because I had spoken with FBI agent Hosty when he had come to the house one or two times to check up on Lee in prior months when Marina was living with Ruth, so I refused to bend to Frank's urging for me to call them. Before long, however, we heard on the radio that an officer Tippit had been shot by a suspect named Lee Oswald. When I heard that I said to myself "what is that pip-squeak doing running around crazy with a pistol?" I realized I had been mistaken about the priority of his motivations and immediately collected my things to go back to the house in Irving.

Police cars were already at the house when I got there. They had come to question Marina, Ruth was translating for them. They had asked Marina whether Lee had a rifle at the house and she answered yes, which totally surprised Ruth. Marina then took them into the garage and pointed up to a blue blanket at the end of the top shelf. The officer pulled down a folded but empty blanket which he dropped on the floor. When I arrived Ruth opened the door to the garage for me where I saw a blue blanket in a heap on the floor. I recognized it because one day I had wanted to use my drill press, which sat on the bench, but there was this long, narrow bundle wrapped in that blue blanket tied up with string lying on the table of the drill press. I lifted it up to see if I could determine what it was, whether it was delicate. It felt like some metal pipes, and I thought it might be camping equipment although that didn't explain why one end was wider than the other. I then laid it on the floor. I was vaguely disturbed that I hadn't really identified what the contents were, but because of being respectful of people's privacy I hadn't probed deeply. I drilled my holes and put the bundle back on the drill press table where it had been. It wasn't until I returned to the house on the 22nd that I learned the contents of the bundle had been a rifle, which I hadn't thought of, but fitted perfectly what I had seen on the drill press table.

The police then took all of us, Ruth, Marina, June, and myself to the police station in Dallas where we were all separately interrogated. After that they asked me if I would like to speak with Lee and left me alone in the room to think about it. I was certainly curious and would have asked Lee not whether he had killed JFK, but why on Earth had he done so? I also thought the place would be bugged by the police and Lee wouldn't feel free to tell me, and it wouldn't be respecting his rights, so I declined to see him. We all then returned home including Lee's mother Marguerite who had also been taken there for questioning.

Marina, daughter June, and Marguerite, whom we were meeting for the first time, spent the night of Nov 22 at our house after our return from the police station in Dallas. That evening we asked Marguerite to tell us about Lee, and she began to relate a story which wove back and forth between Lee's having more involvement and less involvement in the assassination. It seemed that the price that Life Magazine would pay for the story was guiding the tale she told. I thought she didn't really know and was just telling truth or lies to create a good story that would bring a good price. I was thinking how much more decent her two sons were than she was.

The following day the three of them left our house. Marina and June were taken for their protection to an unknown safe house by the Secret Service much to the regret of Ruth. However, Ruth continued to send to Marina, via the Secret Service, things she had left behind in her quick departure and might want. Among these things was a book, on child care, I think. In that book the Secret Service found a note that Marina had hidden there realizing its potential value to her.

This prompted, a week or two after J.F.K's assassination, two Secret Service men to come to our door in Irving wanting to speak to Ruth in private. I was shut in the kitchen and couldn't hear what was being said. I only heard the alarm in her voice. She told me they thought she was attempting to secretly send important information to Marina, based on the finding of a note. The Secret Service agents asked Ruth if she knew anything about this note. She read the note. It was hand written in Russian. I remember that Ruth noticed the author had apparently forgotten the Russian word for key and just wrote key in English which probably suggested to her that Lee had written it. Otherwise she didn't know anything about it. Ruth told me the Secret Service gave her the explanation Marina had given them, which was that Lee had left the note with information she would need in the event he did not return from his undisclosed mission to shoot Edwin Walker. The note listed such things as Lee's safe deposit box number, where the key was, and what money might be available her.

In a conversation I had with Oswald sometime after the story of Walker's assassination attempt was being reported on the news, he revealed his contempt for the police in America when he told me that they couldn't believe it was possible for a person to attempt an assassination without a get-away car. It didn't occur to me at the time that Lee himself might have done it.

In preparing for his undisclosed mission to shoot Major Walker, Lee had taken pictures of Walker's house (The photos were later found by the Warren

Commission), and it's been in my mind he made a place to hide his rifle near where he would shoot from. I don't remember the source of the information that made me think that. After Lee took the shot, he may have hidden his rifle near the scene (probably in a place he had prepared) and got on a bus, the schedule of which he knew, to leave the scene and return home. Marina found the note left on her dresser. Realizing it might be something useful to her to keep, she hid the note in one of her books and never told anyone about it.

There is a criticism, in the case of JFK's assassination, that there is no "smoking gun" revealing that Oswald had the temperament to be an assassin, but that is not correct. The note that fell out of the book that Ruth sent to Marina, as well as the photographs that were found, revealed that Oswald had already planned and carried out an assassination attempt.

For Marina to not tell anyone about the attempted shooting of Gen. Walker was in Ruth's mind inexcusable. However, Marina had a great fear of being sent back to Russia, which was surely an understandable fear for a Russian to have, although I thought American public sentiment might actually have been sympathetic for Marina.

In retrospect, I think that if Lee had been planning to shoot President Kennedy he surely would have had the rifle at his house so that he wouldn't have had to bring it in from Irving. If he had had at least two days to make a plan for assassinating the president I think it would have been much safer to have hidden the rifle right at the Book Depository overlooking the President's route. If Lee had had more than a day to make a plan for shooting the president I think he would have chosen to hide his rifle right there at the Texas Book Depository close to the spot he was going to shoot from. It would have been much safer and more reliable than having to bring the rifle from Irving into Dallas and up to the sixth floor on the day of the President's arrival in Dallas. But he didn't have that time, the route of the President was published only one day before his arrival. So the best he could do was only to assemble an array of boxes that would screen himself from view by the accidental passage of some Book Depository employee coming up to the storage area on the sixth floor.

If Lee had been working for the FBI or the CIA, as some people have claimed, he would have viewed it as a way of infiltrating the government. His dislike for government agencies was frequently and strongly evident in my conversations with him. It is highly unlikely that he would have worked in concert with them. When I saw him on the television news stating that he was a patsy, I thought to myself, "How is he going to support that alibi?" I was looking forward to his explanation of this in his trial. When he said it I thought he looked proud, rather than defeated or downcast. Here he was on national television in the spotlight by himself. The nation would remember him as the one who had shot the president of the strongest capitalist nation of the world. He wanted to be important - not inconsequential. He would be in the history books now, and that is what he wanted.

