

# Welcome to the Lee Harvey Oswald Memorial Library and Research Institute, Marguerite C. Oswald, Director

by William C. Martin

*Quiet, please*



President Kennedy and Lee Harvey Oswald were murdered. These are facts. Nothing else has been proven. They have never proved my son was the assassin. He protested his innocence and he did not have a trial. He was accused and murdered, with no opportunity to defend himself. He died legally innocent. Until they prove to me that he killed President Kennedy, this is my position. I work to find the truth, whatever it may be."

Marguerite Claverie Oswald is

still on the case. For nine years, since she returned to her Fort Worth home after Lee's funeral, she has worked with tireless and dogged persistence to determine what role, if any, her youngest son played in the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, thirty-fifth President of the United States of America. Though she believes Lee Harvey Oswald to have been innocent of the President's murder, Mrs. Oswald insists she is more concerned to find the truth than to

establish his innocence. "I would have a much easier life," she says, "if I knew Lee killed the President. Then I could accept it and the abuse I have received. But I don't know that, so I continue my work. Whenever a newspaper or magazine or radio or television calls my son the assassin, I call or write or telegraph to correct them. I have fought that from the moment it happened. I will not permit that. I insist they call him the 'alleged assassin.' If you will notice the A.P. always refers to Lee as 'the man the Warren Commission claimed was the assassin.' That is the result of my work."

"My work" is a phrase Mrs. Oswald uses often. It is drastic shorthand for a round of activities in which she fills the roles of detective, attorney, research scholar, author, curator, and librarian. Much of her work has been investigative. She has read and made notes on The Warren Commission Report, the twenty-six volumes of The President's Commission on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and a wide and sometimes bizarre array of books and articles by "the critics," the name she gives to all who are interested in the case, but especially to those who are skeptical of the Warren Commission findings. "Even after I am dead," she says, "my work will continue through these people and their children. We know the true story has not been told."

To establish the true story, she has identified and checked into the background of dozens, perhaps hundreds (she reveals few details of her investigative work) of people who appear in photographs of the assassination, the arrest and later the murder of her son, or whom she feels may be important to the case in some other way. She has examined photographs for evidence of doctoring, and claims that some key pictures used to implicate Oswald are outright fakes or have been altered to protect other par-

ties. She has retraced routes various principals are said to have followed on November 22, 1963, and has taken photographs she feels provide evidence her son was not the assassin. "In the early days, I made as many as three trips a day to Dallas to check on something or to take a quick photograph. Sometimes I wore a wig and a pair of slacks so no one would recognize me."

Today, the bulk of her investigative work is done, and Mrs. Oswald is anxious to share her findings and reflections in a major book. "My book—actually, I could write several thick books—will be about Marguerite Oswald and Lee Harvey Oswald and the results of my investigative work. Everybody in the world has written a book on this case except Marguerite Oswald. I am just about ready. I already have several hundred pages written. I just need someone to help me put it into a polished form. I have a lot to contribute. My book will be different from all the others that have been written. Mine will be all new. It will be an important book. I can't say anything else about it."

Years of talking to newsmen, writers, and inquirers of other stripe have taught Marguerite Oswald that she does not have to answer any questions she does not wish to, and most efforts to discover what new light she could shed on the much-examined case are cut off with "That is for my book." One quickly learns, however, that much of her effort will be aimed at refuting and correcting the Warren Report, the "Twenty-Six Volumes," and other writings on the case. "They have made so many mistakes, and I have the documents in my possession to prove it. For instance, they have said that Lee was a Marxist. Lee never said that. He said, 'I have *studied* Marxism, along with other philosophies.' I have that on record. They have said he renounced his American citizen-

ship. I have a document from the State Department proving he did not. The Twenty-Six Volumes reprinted one of Lee's letters from Russia and omitted two lines. I have a copy of that letter in my possession. They said he refused to have his baby christened. I have a slip of paper on which he wrote Marina's name so the minister could read it at the christening. They have written that Lee had a dog named Sunshine. That is not true. The *family* had a dog named Sunshine. Lee's dog was named Blackie.

"I am changing many things like that. The Warren Commission members were not in a position to recognize an error if they heard it. How can they or anybody know the truth if they did not come to check it with me? The Twenty-Six Volumes are my story. They have everything about my life except for the times I went to the bathroom. The major documents they reprinted belong to me. Nobody has what I have. It is a shame the government will sell the Twenty-Six Volumes, when they contain distorted information for students and future generations. It is a shame, since I am available to correct some of these things. I don't understand it. I am the lady that holds the cards. My knowledge is vast and I never say anything that is not true. There is not a word I say that I cannot back up. I have the documents in black and white. But they do not come to me to check them."

In the early years, Mrs. Oswald spent almost full time at her work. Things have slacked off considerably from that pace, but she stays busy. "I get up early and take care of my housework. As you can see, I am a good housekeeper. I get pleasure out of doing things well, whether it is my work, or taking care of my plants, or just simple things like cooking and making beds. I can't afford to hire anyone

to help me, so I do all my own yard work. One day I do the back and the next day I do the front. But I spend at least two hours every day at my work. Sometimes, of course, I spend a lot more than that. This is my work and my life, and I do it. But I don't hurt myself. I am moderate about everything. I am in good health now, but I may not be in two years, so I take care of myself."

Despite her profession of moderation, Mrs. Oswald admits the case is never out of her mind, a piece of intelligence that would surprise no visitor to her home. The dim green living room, blinds pulled to keep the heat out and the utility bills down, is brightened by a large oil portrait of Lee as a sixteen-year-old Civil Air Patrol cadet and a photograph of him as a smiling nineteen-year-old Marine who appears delighted to be serving his country ("Lee Harvey Oswald was as American as apple pie. He had his finger in it"). Flanked by these and other pictures, including Whistler's Mother, Mrs. Oswald often sits in her easy chair and browses through the Twenty-Six Volumes—"I just pick one out and start reading at random, much as people do who read the Bible." The volumes give abundant evidence of her having been there, as she has filled the margins of page after page with such comments as, "She is lying," and "This has been proven wrong."

In the spotless, early-American-type kitchen, a small chalkboard graced by stars and an eagle bears the cryptic message: "They are all making the same mistake . . . M.C.O." The note has been there five years, but M.C.O. will not specify precisely what the mistake is. ("That will be in my book.")

Just off the kitchen, in a small study/den, one finds the nerve center of the Lee Harvey Oswald Memorial Museum-Library-Research Institute. (Continued on page 160)

## WELCOME TO THE LEE HARVEY OSWALD MEMORIAL LIBRARY AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE, MARGUERITE C. OSWALD, DIRECTOR

(Continued from page 143) Here, Marguerite Oswald reads and remembers and thinks and writes. Here, she has gathered many of the source materials and artifacts most crucial to her investigative work and the writing she expects to do. Any feeling that this is an ordinary room at the rear of an ordinary home vanishes quickly as one begins to focus on individual items and to process the running commentary that comes with the tour.

Memorabilia and related bric-a-brac include Lee's baptismal certificate and baby picture ("He was a beautiful child"), a large photograph of the assassination, taken split seconds after the President was hit ("That picture alone clears Lee Harvey Oswald"), a tiny cedar chest containing a map of the assassination scene, and a plaque noting similarities between the Lincoln and Kennedy assassinations: both men were interested in civil rights, both were killed on Friday in the presence of their wives, both were succeeded by Southern Democrats named Johnson who had served in the Senate; Lincoln's secretary, named Kennedy, advised him not to go to the theatre; Kennedy's secretary, named Lincoln, advised him not to go to Dallas. "You would be amazed at the things like that I have turned up. For example, the Kennedy brothers' names are John, Robert, and Edward. My father's name was John, my oldest son's name is John Edward, my other son's name is Robert. Jackie's mother's maiden name was Lee, just like my son's. My middle name is Frances, just like Robert's. Marina and Jackie and I were all born in July. And just the other day, Pat Nixon said her favorite flower was the marguerite. I nearly fell over. It's amazing the way it goes on and on. Think about that."

The bookshelves in the room are jammed with almost five hundred volumes, most wrapped in plastic to preserve them for future generations. Mrs. Oswald has tried to purchase every book in print that deals with the assassination, her son, herself, or political and public figures who have touched the Oswalds' lives in some way, all books Lee is alleged to have read, and any other books she thinks may help her understand her son, his thoughts and actions, and what happened to him. She has followed similar acquisition guidelines in collecting the rows and stacks of newspapers, journals, and magazines that fill linen and clothes closets, corners of back bedrooms, desks, boxes, cabinets, and other available containers and surfaces.

Among the holdings in the audiovisual section of the library, Mrs. Oswald has Lee's voice on two records, both made from a radio debate on Marxism held after he returned from Russia, an album entitled *The Oswald Case—Marguerite Oswald Reads Lee Harvey Oswald's Letters From Russia*, audio and video tapes of all the radio and television programs she has ap-

peared on since the assassination, audio tapes of many documentary programs dealing with the case, most supplemented by snapshots taken from the televised picture, photographs of the assassination and Oswald's funeral, some of which have never been made public, and a print of the Zapruder film ("Does that surprise you? I know I'm not supposed to have it, but I do. If you have an 8mm projector, I'll show it to you").

The collection also contains thousands of letters. Some are from the State Department and other government sources. Many are from well-wishers all over the world. Mrs. Oswald has saved copies of all letters she herself has written since Lee went to Russia. Her output has been impressive. "I spend a lot of time writing letters—correcting things, corresponding with the critics, answering questions people ask me, trying to find something out as a part of my investigative work. I write to anybody I think can help on the case. I wrote a letter to President Nixon just before he was inaugurated, telling him I had important information and that I hoped he would reopen the case. I drove down to the Post Office while he was taking the oath of office and mailed it when he had been President just a few minutes. It was probably the first letter mailed to him after he became President."

"You ought to see some of my letters. I am not a typist. I just use two fingers and I make a lot of mistakes. I start out every letter with 'Please excuse errors . . . thank you,' and then I just go ahead and let them worry about the mistakes. A psychiatrist would have a field day with those mistakes, but they don't mean anything except that I can't type. I can't afford a secretary, so I have to do the best I can. I tried to learn to type two different times. I bought a touch-typing chart, and got dressed and started work every morning at nine just like I had a job downtown. I tried it for about a week both times, but it made me so nervous I got sick and had to give it up. You are getting some idea of the problems of Marguerite Oswald."

Mrs. Oswald continues to receive any visitor who comes to her home. "I am listed in the phone book. If anybody wants to find me, they can. I have never refused to talk to anyone. I like to observe their reaction to me, to my home, and my work. I try not to let it bother me when people misuse me. I am not going to become a mental case or let them get me down. I have been a fighter all my life. I am on top and I plan to stay on top. I have been called 'The Unsinkable Marguerite Oswald.'"

The only thing she fears may eventually sink her is poverty. "If I were to show you my bank account, you would fall through the floor and ask me, 'Marguerite, how in the world do you do it?'" I have not been able to get a job since the assassination. Nobody wants to hire the mother of the man

who is supposed to have killed the President of the United States. Millions have been made off the Oswald family, and here I am penniless, wondering where my next meal is coming from, or whether I am going to be able to make the next house payment. I know I look like I live well, but I have learned how to stretch things. I don't use the lights or air conditioning except when it is absolutely necessary. I eat very little meat or sugar, and I haven't bought a new dress in four years.

"The only way I have to live besides a little social-security check is to sell my possessions. I auctioned off most of Lee's letters from Russia at first, and used that money to make the down payment on my house and to start my library. I only have two of those letters left now. I am asking \$1,300 for one of them. I am going to keep the last one as long as I can, because it should bring a big price. I also have many State Department documents pertaining to Lee. When I have to have some money, I pick something out and send a copy to people I know are interested, or I put out a little flyer describing the item. I could sell everything I have, and I might if I got the right price, but I feel like I need to stretch them out as far as I can. Who knows? I may live another twenty years. I have been advised to sell my library and to sign every book, 'From the library of Marguerite C. Oswald.' But I am not going to do all that writing until I am ready to sell them. If I wrote in them now, I would just have to worry about someone stealing them."

Financial strain has perhaps contributed to Mrs. Oswald's strong sense of her importance as "a mother in history" and of the consequent value of her signature, her recorded voice, or any item that has belonged to her. "I seldom sign my name to anything. My signature is worth something. If I am going to sign my name, I am going to get \$100 for it to buy some groceries. I also refuse to let anyone record my voice or take my picture without paying."

"Everything in my house, even an ashtray, is a historical item, and it will cost anybody to get one. I want to sell one of my typewriters, but whoever buys it will have to pay extra because it belonged to me. I will sell my set of the Twenty-Six Volumes with my notes and my initials in the margins. I would also like to sell the headstone from Lee's grave, but I hope it will go to a museum or library. They know they are not going to get it for nothing."

"I know all this sounds bad, but I have no other way to live. I have to sell my personal belongings, that have sentimental value to me, to support myself. This is what they have done to me. I am the only person in the world who works this hard and doesn't get paid for it. So I am willing to turn anything I have into cash, because that is the way I live. Is that wrong? I don't think it is. I am doing the best I can for myself and for my son. I think any man in America would be proud to have a mother like me." #

# WELCOME TO THE LEE HARVEY OSWALD MEMORIAL LIBRARY

ESQUIRE | JANUARY 1973



Reprinted from the Esquire Archive

<https://classic.esquire.com/article/19730101099/print>