Contents

List of Illustrations ix
Acknowledgments xi
Editor's Introduction xiii
Preface: “I’m Just a Patsy!” 1
1. First Conversations with Lee 5
2. Lee’s Troubled Marriage to Marina 26
3. Final Conversations with Lee 49
4. Haiti and the Warren Commission 71
5. A Ghost Visits: Finding a Photograph 94
6. Who Were the Real Criminals? 107
Appendix A: Letter from George de Mohrenschildt to Mrs. Janet Lee Auchincloss 125
Appendix B: Excerpts from George de Mohrenschildt’s Warren Commission Testimony 128
Illustrations

1. Guards escorting Lee Harvey Oswald after his arrest  3
2. Oswald in the courtyard of the Gorizont Electronics Factory sometime in the summer of 1960  10
3. J. Edgar Hoover, Director of the FBI (September 28, 1961)  14
4. Marina and Lee Harvey Oswald leaving Minsk, bound for the United States  27
5. Lee, Marina, and baby June sometime in the summer of 1962  31
6. Texas Governor John Connally welcomes President and Mrs. Kennedy on board of the presidential limousine at Love Field, Dallas, on November 22, 1963  42
7. Fidel Castro addresses the United Nations General Assembly in 1960  58
8. Che Guevara after the Battle of Santa Clara (January 1, 1959)  58

10. Aeroport François Duvalier, Port-au-Prince, Haiti (circa mid-1960s)

11. Ex-PresidentFrançois Duvalier addresses the public from the porch of the Presidential Palace, Port-au-Prince, Haiti (May 22, 1963)

12. The Auchincloss home, located at 3044 O Street, N.W., Georgetown, in 2008

13. George de Mohrenschildt at the time of his NBC interview, (November 25, 1964)

14. Lee Harvey Oswald poses with rifle, pistol, and copies of *The Militant* and *The Worker*

15. Marina Oswald arrives to testify at the Warren Commission hearings (June 11, 1964)

16. President Kennedy is presented the Brigada Asalto 2506 flag during a ceremony held at Florida’s Orange Bowl Stadium on December 29, 1962

17. Willem Oltmans holding a copy of his book *Den Vaderland Getrouwe* (November 12, 1973)


19. George de Mohrenschildt—Bishop College professor, with wife, Jeanne (circa 1974)
Untying the Gordian knot that is George de Mohrenschildt’s manuscript would not have been possible without a small ocean of primary documents now easily accessible in digital form, the most important of which were the following: the Warren Commission’s Records Relating to Key Persons (particularly folders 7460466, 7460467, and 7460468) found in the JFK Assassination Records of the National Archives; the HSCA Segregated CIA Collection (microfilm—reel 5) and Russ Holmes Work File available at the Mary Ferrell Foundation; and the thirty-one volumes of Willem Oltmans’s Memoires now available through the Digital Library of Dutch Literature. Additional assistance was provided by the JFK Presidential Library, the Office of University Publications at the University of Texas, Arlington, Willis Library at the University of North Texas, the Pan Am Historical Association, and the La Fonda Hotel. I would like to thank reviewers Lock K. Johnson and John Prados for their comments and everyone at the University Press of Kansas for their professionalism in preparing the final manuscript for publication.
Editor’s Introduction

Let us hope that this book, poorly written and disjointed, but sincere, will help to clear up our relationship with our dear, dead friend Lee.

—George S. de Mohrenschildt

Thus concludes an unpublished manuscript by George Sergei de Mohrenschildt. Readers would be justified in asking themselves: who was this man, what does it matter that he wrote a book at all, and why bother to edit and annotate a text that was, by his own admission, both disorganized and badly composed? While trained as a scholar and a published author myself, I am an acquisitions editor by trade. An acquisitions editor is, in essence, a talent scout who secures worthy manuscripts for his or her publisher. Evaluating manuscripts for both intellectual merit and marketability consumes a major portion of my time each day. Why is that important? It means I’d like to think I am better qualified than most to know a manuscript with potential when I see it. When I began reading the de Mohrenschildt text that was included in an appendix volume of the House Select Committee on Assassinations (HSCA), I very quickly realized there was something special about the material, possibly even something extraordinary. This was an author with an interesting and entertaining story to tell. The author also just so happened to be the man who was, many have argued, the closest friend Lee Harvey Oswald had in the final months of 1962 and the early months of 1963. Oswald, of course, has long been presumed to be the individual who assassinated President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963.

A definitive single-volume biography of de Mohrenschildt, who was born
in 1911 and died in 1977, does not exist. Such a work remains to be written; it is surprising after all the time and attention paid to his life, and by so many, many, writers, that one hasn’t been written. As his friend of some two decades Sam Ballen said, “George had one of the most fascinating and complex life journeys that can be imagined.” On the one hand, this lack of a biography is somewhat of a shame given that so many individuals who personally knew de Mohrenschildt, including his fourth wife, Jeanne, his brother Dmitri, his daughter Alexandra, and best friend Ballen survived into the 1990s and beyond. On the other hand, given the fact that so many secret documents relating to de Mohrenschildt’s activities between the 1940s and 1960s have only recently been declassified and made available to researchers, perhaps this delay was for the best. The biographical material the reader will find within this introduction and sprinkled throughout the hundreds of annotations that accompany the manuscript cannot substitute for this still-unwritten biography. Its purpose is simply to give the reader unfamiliar with George de Mohrenschildt’s oversized and cinematic life a better sense of the author behind the manuscript he left behind.

Diderot’s Nephew

George de Mohrenschildt in his final years was a professor of French and Russian in the Literature Department of Bishop College, a small, predominantly black institution in Dallas. The manuscript you are about to read abounds with references and allusions to writers and classics from both French and Russian literature. If there is a single work one could turn to in order to gain an understanding of who George de Mohrenschildt was, particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s, it would certainly be Le neveu de Rameau (Rameau’s Nephew), a unique and incomparable work written in the eighteenth century by that leading figure of the Enlightenment, Denis Diderot. In the story the narrator, identified only as Moi (Me), recounts his recent encounter with Lui (Him) in the Palais-Royal. Lui is introduced with the following description:

He is a compound of the highest and the lowest, good sense and folly. The notions of good and evil must be strangely muddled in his head, for the good qualities nature has given him he displays without ostentation, and the bad ones without shame. Moreover he is blessed with a strong constitution, a singularly fervid imagination, and lung power quite out of the ordinary. . . . Nothing is less like him than himself.
Lui complains bitterly that the low value society assigns to learned men of talent such as himself leaves no better option than to adopt a parasitical relationship with the wealthy, living at their expense by any means necessary, however repugnant, whether it be self-abasement, flattery, or dishonesty. When it is all over the reader cannot be certain whether anything Lui has said is sincerely held or simply provocative; Lui is simultaneously ironic, self-contradicting, and seemingly unreliable, yet skillfully embedded in his complaints there appear to shine deeper truths. The manuscript contained herein, I would argue, is much the same. George de Mohrenschildt was a living, breathing Lui, a mid-twentieth-century European émigré of innumerable personas including, but by no means limited to: petroleum geologist and strategic resources entrepreneur and hustler; irreverent iconoclast and teasing comedian; refined cosmopolitan and social chameleon; physical fitness buff and devoted tennis aficionado; cystic fibrosis foundation fundraiser and friend to young people; ardent anti-segregationist and liberal professor in the middle of conservative Texas; and finally, Old World European and old-school male.

Many details regarding de Mohrenschildt’s personality, worldview, and conduct in life may be gleaned from his own Warren Commission testimony, the testimony of his fourth wife, Jeanne, as well as that of their friends and acquaintances in Dallas. This view may now be supplemented, thanks to the passage of the John F. Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act of 1992, with a seemingly endless stream of declassified government documents including not only decades of FBI investigation but also intense interest from the CIA, Office of Naval Intelligence, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, the Department of the Army, the State Department, and the Civil Service Commission. These declassified documents reveal how deeply baffled and bewildered de Mohrenschildt’s life left these federal bureaucrats, hopelessly mired in their institutional arrogance and Manichean Cold War fantasy worlds. De Mohrenschildt was suspected of being, alternately and simultaneously, an *agent provocateur* for French nationalists; Germans fascists; Polish, Yugoslav, and/or Russian Communists; and both a Haitian dictator and the dictator’s leading political opponent. He and Jeanne—herself suspected of being either an anarchist, a Bohemian, or somebody’s agent—were seemingly always broke or possessing mysteriously acquired wealth, driving everywhere in convertibles with a pair of Manchester Terriers who appear to have antagonized and/or traumatized everyone they came in contact with. He was summed up by informants—who seemed to have been perpetually in his company—as “eccentric, irresponsible, conceited, an adventurer fond
of exaggeration, and overly aggressive,” while socially he was “known to associate with persons of questionable loyalty, reputation, and moral character.” It would be the stuff of some film noir or dark comedy, were it not for the tragedy of President John F. Kennedy’s assassination and the fact that the agencies seeking to investigate it had managed to convince themselves de Mohrenschildt and his wife possessed some kind of clandestine information—knowledge these same agencies were desperate to acquire.

The Manuscript and the Edit

Genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary. It operates on a field of tangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.

—Michel Foucault

In addition to dabbling in documentary film and his accomplishments as a talented watercolor artist, George de Mohrenschildt was an avid writer throughout much of his life. Government reports have him working as a journalist for the Polish government press, the Polish Agency Telegraph, between 1934 and 1938; de Mohrenschildt had some hope of becoming a journalist after his arrival in the United States. He claimed to have published a number of articles, both in Europe and in the United States. Most of these are now difficult to verify. The manuscript itself mentions an article on the motion picture industry in Europe that was published during the 1940s in Variety. There were in addition several articles published in Oil and Gas Journal including one titled “Yugoslavia, Young Oil Province with Underdeveloped Prospects” that was published in 1958 after his trip to Yugoslavia the previous year under the auspices of the International Cooperation Association. Prior to writing the present manuscript, he authored at least three other book-length works and had hoped to publish them. While he was living in Mexico with the lovely señora Larin in 1941, he was working on a bawdy tale called Adventures of a Young Man in Mexico. He described it as “more or less a romantic dissertation, a romantic book based on some of my experiences.” The manuscript was submitted to at least one publisher but was rejected, apparently on account of de Mohrenschildt’s limited command of written English. He began a second book, a work on his early life called A Son of the Revolution, and apparently hired a stenographer to assist him. The fate of these two manuscripts and whether either still exists is unknown.
By the time he testified before the Warren Commission in April 1964 de Mohrenschildt had completed a third work, possibly titled Trois et le Mule (Three and a Mule), a 600-page draft manuscript describing “the day-by-day adventures” of his walk through Central America with Jeanne in 1960–1961. He approached a number of high-profile individuals to write a foreword to the book, including President Kennedy. All, as far as we know, politely declined. He claimed in his Warren Commission testimony the manuscript “is now in the hands of a publisher in France, and they may publish it.” While the manuscript may have intrigued this French publisher, it was turned down, though probably not due to de Mohrenschildt’s command of French, which was apparently excellent. As described by de Mohrenschildt this manuscript was written almost like “a diary” and needed to be developed into a unified and compelling narrative. “Someday,” he said, “when I have more time, I will make it a bit more colorful.” Such a task was beyond de Mohrenschildt’s abilities and was certainly incompatible with his extremely restless and impatient nature. As Jeanne said, he couldn’t sit still. Despite being “professionally rewritten” and submitted to several publishers, the manuscript was never accepted for publication. The fate of this third manuscript and whether it still exists is also unknown.

The manuscript presented here, the fourth completed by George de Mohrenschildt during his lifetime, appears to have had its genesis in January 1969, at the urging of Dutch journalist Willem Oltmans. In his enormous multivolume Memoires, Oltmans’s entry for January 26, 1969, reads: “The past few days with George and Jeanne were useful in that I have now convinced them to write about their experiences with Lee Harvey Oswald.” Like its predecessors the new manuscript was also intended for publication, though it appears the de Mohrenschildts never seriously entertained the idea of hiring a literary agent, preferring to leave such details to their Dutch friend. Oltmans’s memoirs indicate that he spoke to Random House on February 6, 1969, and the publisher had shown “enormous interest” in a book “by George and Jeanne de Mohrenschildt about Lee Harvey Oswald.” That same day a letter from de Mohrenschildt written on January 29 arrived, informing Oltmans that thanks to Jeanne’s “extraordinary memory” he had “the plan and two chapters completed.”

On February 14 and 15, 1969, a series of audio-taped readings from the draft manuscript were made in the company of Oltmans at the CBS studios in Dallas. Large portions of the final manuscript are based on these tapes, and de Mohrenschildt alludes to them in the manuscript’s final sentences. Oltmans’s exceptionally long entry in his memoirs for February 15, 1969,
which summarizes these recording sessions, contains noticeable parallels to much of the material found in Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4. In a letter he wrote to Oltmans dated May 10, 1976, de Mohrenschildt would say, in his sometimes ambiguous English, “As I listened to the tapes and tried to transcribe them, I realize[d] that they can be of a little help, just to remind me of certain details. OK, so I just sat down and tried to reconstruct Lee’s personality. Jeanne was of great help. Several books are being written on about the same subject, but the most serious [Edward J. Epstein’s *Inquest*] will be next to mine, I hope.”

Oltmans attempted to shop the tapes around but, to his clear frustration, encountered a mixture of uninterest and hostility. The timing was exceptionally bad. New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw had been arrested in 1967 and charged by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison with conspiring to assassinate President Kennedy. On March 1, 1969, a jury in New Orleans had acquitted Shaw after less than an hour of deliberation. The managing editor of *Look* magazine, William Arthur, told Oltmans on March 13 he had no interest in listening to any of the tapes. “Oswald was just crazy,” he told Oltmans, and Garrison’s case had been a fiasco; interest in the assassination was finished. Doubleday indicated on March 26 that it, too, had no desire to become involved with yet another book about Lee Harvey Oswald. Public interest in Oswald’s story, the publisher informed Oltmans, had been exhausted and it was time for the country to move on. When a draft of the entire manuscript was finally finished in the early summer of 1976 the de Mohrenschildts did not actively push to see it published. Jeanne, apparently, was too concerned they’d be prosecuted for mentioning the names of FBI and CIA agents. In his increasingly fragile physical and mental state, George was inclined to agree with her.

During the winter of 1977 some negotiations with “Dutch television and publishing executives” did occur in Amsterdam between March 3 and March 4, during the brief time de Mohrenschildt spent in Europe with Oltmans. Oltmans, who had come to Dallas in February, had convinced de Mohrenschildt to travel to Holland with him when de Mohrenschildt told him in the Bishop College library that he “felt responsible” for what Oswald had done, and that his actions had “guided” Oswald’s behavior. Oltmans, who had harbored hopes of some kind of “confession” for years, interpreted this as the beginning of a major revelation. On several occasions de Mohrenschildt had jokingly suggested to Oltmans he might have organized Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas. For example on February 16, 1969, while driving Oltmans to the Dallas airport at Love Field he surprised the Dutch-
man by saying “How would you like it, Willem, if it became known that I am indeed the one who organized the assassination of JFK?”

Carel Enkelaar of Dutch NOS Television had urged Oltmans to secure an admission of involvement or guilt from de Mohrenschildt. Now the moment finally appeared to be at hand.

In one version of the meeting in Amsterdam Enkelaar was offering “a month’s stay in a fine hotel plus a staff to write the story for book, film, and television versions.”

When a phone call to the de Mohrenschildts’ Dallas lawyer, Patrick S. Russell Jr., confirmed a complete manuscript already existed both Oltmans and Enkelaar became even more determined to have a contract signed granting them exclusive rights to the material; as enticements they offered the possibility that “Italian and French publishers might also be very interested in some rights to serialization and a book.” In an article he later published in Nieuwe Revu, Oltmans claimed the discussion was mainly about “worldwide publication of his book and he agreed in principle to the terms proposed by the Strengholt Publishing House.”

In the end, however, the negotiations for the manuscript fell through; it became apparent to de Mohrenschildt the two parties were discussing quite different books. “With Oltmans’s growing excitement, de Mohrenschildt understood that the only chronicle of events would be a sensational one. He knew that the document . . . did not contain any such revelations [and] grasped the compromising position in which he had placed himself.” He fled the next day while he and Oltmans were on a weekend trip together in Brussels. Print articles appearing in the days after de Mohrenschildt’s death on March 29 expressed an awareness of the manuscript and speculated about its possible content. A copy was donated with Jeanne’s consent to the HSCA on April 1. The contents must have led to considerable disappointment, as they yielded no pat “smoking gun” revelations. Interest in the manuscript quickly waned, but not before Time magazine ran a contemptuous article branding de Mohrenschildt both a lunatic and an opportunist seeking to cash in on the Kennedy assassination.

I have been an editor for close to fifteen years. Occasionally, but only with the most deserving projects I have acquired, I have also performed what is known in the book business as developmental editing. The work of the developmental editor consists of redrafting, revising, and otherwise improving and polishing a manuscript for authors who are otherwise unable to do so for themselves. Such work is meant to accentuate and amplify the author’s own words, ideas, and thoughts—not change them. Developmental editing is far more common in the world of trade publishing, less so in...
scholarly publishing. Academic authors have areas of specialization so narrow only another expert would be qualified to recommend improvements and otherwise develop their manuscript. The de Mohrenschildt manuscript, while written by someone with scholarly credentials, is, however, a trade book. It is meant for a general audience. Developmental editing was simply a matter of care, patience, and meticulous attention to detail.

What does this mean? It means I’d like to think I’m better qualified than most to describe the problems found in the de Mohrenschildt manuscript, propose developmental editing solutions to those problems, and then carry them out. It is essential to remember that the de Mohrenschildt manuscript was not even what might be called a first draft. It is more like a very rough first draft of a first draft. Had a book contract been signed and had the manuscript been turned over to any publishing house in operation during the late-1970s, as certainly seems to have been de Mohrenschildt’s hope, the material would have required major developmental editing and copy editing in order to become a publishable work. What follows is a list of the manuscript’s most significant problems as a manuscript—leaving aside for the moment its accuracy as history—and some discussion of the developmental editing solutions undertaken to remedy them.

First, even the work’s title—I Am a Patsy! I Am a Patsy!—is a misnomer and hence problematic. It appears to have arisen out of a 1967 conversation de Mohrenschildt had with the liberal owner/editor-in-chief of the Midlothian Mirror, William Penn Jones Jr.36 As recounted in Chapter 6 by de Mohrenschildt, Jones told him “I shall never forget Lee Harvey Oswald’s face, beaten brutally to a pulp, of his terrified expression when he was being led by beefy policemen the day of President Kennedy’s assassination. And this young man kept shouting ‘I am a patsy!’ ‘I am a patsy!’”37 Jones’s comments apparently left de Mohrenschildt with the impression Oswald had been continually beaten during the short hours he was in Dallas police custody, and from all indications it was Jones who was the source of de Mohrenschildt’s belief that the twice-repeated sentence was Oswald’s “last words” in public. In truth Oswald was not beaten while in custody, appeared controlled and slightly defiant rather than terrified, and when asked by a reporter at roughly 7:55 CST on November 22, 1963, whether he had killed the president, Oswald responded, “They are taking me in because I lived in the Soviet Union. I’m just a patsy.” The “patsy” self-reference made by Oswald was uttered just once, not twice and, while said emphatically, was not shouted in terror.

The title has therefore been changed to Lee Harvey Oswald as I Knew
Him. The reason should be abundantly clear to anyone who has actually taken the time to carefully read the complete manuscript from beginning to end. The primary focus of the text is a series of recollections about the man Lee Harvey Oswald himself. The majority of the material is an attempt to “humanize” our view of Oswald through a retelling of the brief time that de Mohrenschildt and his wife, Jeanne, befriended him and his wife, Marina. And the time was quite short, shorter than much of the Kennedy assassination literature seems willing to admit. The de Mohrenschildts were in close contact with the Oswalds for something in the neighborhood of perhaps sixty days, from roughly mid-September through mid-November 1962. Thereafter contact diminished considerably but did not completely end until Easter of 1963. A secondary focus of de Mohrenschildt’s text consists of several meditations on the corrosive effects knowing the Oswalds had on the professional and personal lives of the de Mohrenschildts, first in Haiti, then in Dallas after their return in 1966, and then finally echoing across the years up until the time of the draft’s completion in 1976. Only in a tertiary sense—and even then only in an embryonic, rudimentary form—is the manuscript in any way concerned with Oswald’s guilt or innocence regarding the Kennedy assassination. Yet this last aspect is what, largely based on use of the word “patsy” in the title, the manuscript is presumed by most everyone to be about. In the publishing business editors routinely change their authors’ titles. The new title, I think any objective reading will agree, more accurately reflects the manuscript’s true and actual contents.

Second, there is a nearly endless profusion of grammatical and punctuation errors within the manuscript. Spellings, too, are often wrong or wildly inconsistent. The document suffers greatly from what in scholarly publishing we call the “English as a second language” problem. In other words while the author might be highly intelligent, the text itself is not written in a native tongue. The prose in de Mohrenschildt’s manuscript, depending on one’s level of generosity, reads like a mediocre to below-average translation of Russian into English. Russian and English are quite dissimilar languages. The system of grammar within each, for example, is quite different. In English grammar the rules for word order are fairly fixed. Meaning is expressed through the addition of words. Auxiliary verbs, for example, are used to help express grammatical tense, aspect, mood, and voice. Grammatical rules in Russian, in contrast, convey meaning largely through changes in the composition of words, for example by inflections or the addition of prefixes and suffixes. Word order in Russian is very fluid. Russian and English also convey meaning through their verb systems in drastically different ways.
The Russian system is based on the concept of the aspect: actions are either completed or not completed. There are few auxiliary verbs. This contrasts with English which has progressive and perfect tense forms, and avoids the need for affixation or inflection by the extensive use of auxiliaries. Russian furthermore has no articles. This causes significant problems because the whole concept of article use is alien to Russian learners of English, and the English article system itself is extremely complex. Russian is also largely phonetic—pronunciation can be predicted from spelling and spelling from pronunciation; English most definitely is not. When Kennedy assassination researchers puzzle over de Mohrenschildt misspelling “Oswald” as “Os-vald” in written correspondence, to give perhaps the most obvious example, it simply demonstrates their ignorance of these linguistic differences.

All of the aforementioned issues have, therefore, been editorially addressed. The entire manuscript has been thoroughly cleaned and polished to eliminate the many artifacts of de Mohrenschildt’s limited command of written English. Where there was even a slight chance that the reader might conclude a revision had altered the meaning of the original material—for example, de Mohrenschildt says “motif” where “motive” is plainly meant—an endnote has been provided and the original word, phrase, or sentence included in the note for comparison. At the same time I did want to retain the flavor of his prose, particularly conversations we may assume were as often as not occurring in Russian. Spoken quotations by George, Lee, Jeanne, and Marina have been kept unchanged and intact, except for obvious misspellings arising from the limitations of de Mohrenschildt’s English and simple typographical errors. Quotes by native English speakers, in contrast, have been edited so as to flow as if spoken in English. For example, in Chapter 3 Admiral Bruton says, “I’m being made into a salesman” rather than “I am made to be a salesman.” No italics exist in the original manuscript and have been added throughout the text to emphasize certain points. Where de Mohrenschildt is “quoting” from a published document, such as the single-volume Warren Commission Report or the multivolume Warren Commission Hearings and Exhibits, only obvious misspellings have been corrected and the original document, if available, is quoted verbatim for the sake of comparison and accuracy in the notes.

Third, the manuscript is a mess organizationally. While the text refers to itself as having “chapters,” there are in fact no chapters, at least as far as the word is traditionally understood in book publishing. De Mohrenschildt misunderstands the word in at least two different ways, using “chapter” to denote what would ordinarily be considered sections within a single chap-
ter, and to indicate a simple paragraph-length passage within a single section.39 The crude draft manuscript is probably best described as a series of vignettes, that is, short impressionistic scenes each just a few pages in length. While some do manage to transition into one another in a relatively smooth manner, others jump back and forth both topically and chronologically in a distracting and jarring fashion, not only between vignettes but even within them. The arc of the narrative meanders confusingly back and forth between the early 1960s and the mid-1970s, occasionally interrupted by a digression covering a topic before 1960 or from the later 1960s and early 1970s. There is also a fair degree of repetition in the material, with descriptions of the same event repeated a second and sometimes even a third time in only slightly modified form in different portions of the manuscript. These duplicate passages have been combined using the best elements of each.

Chapters are therefore called for. The chapter names were chosen to reflect their content and may be summarized as follows. Conversations between de Mohrenschildt and Oswald in the late summer and early fall of 1962 about Lee’s time in Minsk as well as political topics and events have been placed in Chapter 1. Conversations regarding the troubled marriage between Lee and Marina have been located in Chapter 2. The more limited contact between the de Mohrenschildts and the Oswalds in the winter and spring of 1963 and the preparations for the de Mohrenschildts’ move to Haiti constitute Chapter 3. The assassination of President Kennedy and its aftermath, including the de Mohrenschildts’ 1964 Warren Commission testimony and the consequences that followed because of it, are the focus of Chapter 4. Their return from Haiti and the 1967 discovery of the now well known “hunter of fascists” photo by Jeanne in their stored belongings is the basis of Chapter 5. Finally de Mohrenschildt’s mid-1970s musings about the possible existence of a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy, and the question of Oswald’s possible guilt or innocence, is the subject matter of Chapter 6.40

For the most part, I should emphasize, the edited material still proceeds from beginning to end exactly as de Mohrenschildt wrote it, but with a few notable exceptions. A few vignettes have been relocated. The material titled “Why Lee and I Disliked the FBI” appears near the end of the original manuscript in what is now Chapter 6 but, given how valuable this material is in establishing both men’s negative views of bureaucratic authority, it has been relocated to Chapter 1. Similarly the vignette “Marina and the Walker Incident” appears well after the de Mohrenschildts’ discovery of the “hunter of fascists” photo but given that Oswald’s alleged attempted shooting of
General Walker is directly tied to the photo it makes sense to pair the material together in what is now Chapter 5. Most of the original vignette names have been retained as headings within each chapter, though a few have been renamed to better reflect the content of the material linked to them and, in a handful of instances, new headings have been created where none previously existed but where the text was marked by a major shift in subject matter. Any competent editor working with de Mohrenschildt circa 1977 to develop the manuscript would have insisted on precisely these sorts of changes.

Fourth, the manuscript reflects the life of an extraordinary, larger than life character who seemingly knew everyone. The manuscript is a veritable cornucopia of name dropping, something both de Mohrenchildts were notorious for doing in conversation. Sometimes de Mohrenchildt supplies the reader an individual’s name, but frequently there is no name, merely a mention of the individual’s occupation, employer, or some other feature felt to be adequate enough for identification. The most important information from de Mohrenchildt’s perspective is the level of friendship they shared with him; either a good friend, a slight acquaintance, or a stranger. Occasionally some biographical detail might be attached to the individual, but more often than not the surrounding historical context is utterly lacking. To assist the reader full names have been inserted into the text whenever the individual could be confidently identified. Short biographical summaries of each individual have also been placed in the notes, including birth and death dates and details of importance, especially if they relate to the Cold War, the Kennedy assassination, or the world of Port-au-Prince in the early 1960s.

Two additional things also need to be said about the “voice” of de Mohrenchildt’s manuscript. First, the reader will notice that the text more often than not refers to its narrator in the plural, for example, by use of “we” rather than “I,” “our dear, dead friend Lee,” rather than “my dear, dead friend Lee,” and so on—it speaks for both George and Jeanne. Second, to avoid possible confusion when reading the notes, I have used “de Mohrenchildt” when referring to George only and “the de Mohrenchildts” when referring to both George and Jeanne. Similarly when I indicate “Oswald” I am referring only to Lee while “the Oswalds” refers to both Lee and Marina. When, more infrequently, the note is about only Mrs. de Mohrenchildt or Mrs. Oswald “Jeanne” and “Marina” have been used, respectively.
Interpretation of the Text

Hear me! For I am such and such a person.
Above all, do not mistake me for someone else!

—Friedrich Nietzsche

In the fall of 1888 the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, toiling in the twilight of sanity, completed his final original work. It was an autobiographical essay whose title consisted of the Latin words supposedly used by Pontius Pilate when he presented the scourged Jesus to the hostile crowd: *Ecce homo*. Behold the man. A central preoccupation of the document was Nietzsche’s own posterity. “Have I been understood?” the text practically cries out. Days after completing the work Nietzsche was gone, the abyss he had so frequently peered into having finally swallowed him. The de Mohrenschildt manuscript also commands that we behold a man and understand him, in this case de Mohrenschildt and his association with Lee Harvey Oswald. In de Mohrenschildt’s case, as in Nietzsche’s, time was beginning to run out. His persecution complex, in evidence since at least the late 1950s, intensified into debilitating fear and paranoia. Depression had also been a growing problem. His behavior became increasingly disturbed and self-destructive during 1976, especially its final quarter, so much so that on November 9 Jeanne and family lawyer Russell filed court papers with the Dallas County Mental Illness Department to have him committed to Parkland Hospital for psychiatric treatment. He would remain there until the end of the year.

Inevitably, then, the question of the author’s mental state while writing the manuscript has been raised in some quarters. Is the author sane; is he in command of his faculties? In general, he is. Yes, he is deeply frustrated about the ongoing and seemingly never-ending invasion of his privacy. Yes, he is clearly bitter about lost income in general and about the failure of his long-planned Haitian venture in particular. Yes, he takes some embarrassing swipes at people, some of them perhaps deserving, others not. Yes, he definitely has a sizeable grudge against the insensitive methods of bureaucratic agencies within the American government, especially the FBI. Yes, he deeply regrets his failure to realize that a young man whom he saw almost as a surrogate son was on a path to self-destruction, and that through both his actions and inactions he did not prevent that self-destruction from occurring. But the author of the manuscript is rational. There is no doubt in my mind the authorial “voice” that speaks from the manuscript is virtually identical to

EDITOR’S INTRODUCTION  xxv
the voice found in de Mohrenschildt’s Warren Commission testimony given twelve years before. Readers are free to compare the edited manuscript with Appendix B and draw their own conclusions.

To which we may add that by the beginning of the summer of 1976, possibly as early as the middle of July, the manuscript begun in 1969 was already finished. There are no internal references that can be pinpointed beyond that date. The handwritten letter sent to CIA director George H. W. Bush on September 5, reproduced as Appendix D, refers to writing about Oswald in the past tense, that is, “I tried to write . . . about Lee H. Oswald” not “I am trying to write . . . about Lee H. Oswald.” The narrative you will encounter is not the work of the despondent soul teetering in confusion between fact and fancy during the opening months of 1977, being pushed ever closer to the abyssal edge by a host of unscrupulous individuals whose motives were anything but noble. Only a combination of de Mohrenschildt’s own difficulty writing in the English language, a failure to understand the differences between inductive and deductive reasoning, and the self-serving desire to cherry-pick from the manuscript in an effort to validate or invalidate certain explanations as to what happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963, could lead to the conclusion that the text is a product of mental illness and therefore easily dismissed.

Having disposed of the question of the author’s sanity, this brings us to the Kennedy assassination literature itself. This cottage industry, still going strong after a half century, routinely mines the HSCA’s version of de Mohrenschildt’s manuscript, selecting a sentence here, extracting a passage there, and rarely to good effect. I am not interested in what these books have to say about Kennedy’s assassination. What I am concerned about is what they have to say about George de Mohrenschildt in general, and the manuscript you are about to encounter in particular. Even when these works do not have the misfortune of blundering over de Mohrenschildt’s rather limited command of written English, the material is usually taken so out of context with regard to both the manuscript as a unified argument and de Mohrenschildt’s life as a unified totality that their analysis—whether unintentionally or intentionally—winds up skewed and distorted, when it is not completely useless. George de Mohrenschildt has become a sort of tabula rasa onto which authors may project almost any kind of fantasy. Since his death the denizens of Kennedy assassination research have, to put it bluntly, bequeathed us an imaginary de Mohrenschildt. The manuscript you are about to read has been exploited to support any number of theories, theories the author himself never expressed or espoused, from the sublime
and the plausible to the implausible and ridiculous. The errors these writers commit, whether by omission or commission, may be summed up as follows: (1) misunderstanding the author and his limitations, (2) misunderstanding the text and its limitations, (3) and misunderstanding the contextual history behind the text.

Regarding (1), they misread problems arising from an individual struggling to communicate in a non-native language, everything from the phonetic spellings to sentences with an almost surreal word order. The author himself, de Mohrenschildt, was aware of this very danger nearly forty years ago: “Maybe the contradictory nature of Marina’s deposition was the result of the testimony being poorly translated. As I have said, Russian is a difficult language.”

Read through the separate testimonies of the Dallas–Fort Worth White Russians in the Warren Commission Hearings and Exhibits and you will find two cultures, and two languages, struggling to make themselves understood to each other. Even so simple a matter as the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Christmas holidays occurring a week apart appears to have been confused and misunderstood at times. The questioning of transplanted Russians such as George Bouhe (born in St. Petersburg), Valentina Ray (Stalino), Igor and Natasha Voshinin (Labinsk), Anna Meller (Belgorod), Elena Hall (Tehran, Iran, to parents from Baku), Natalie Ray (Stalingrad), Lydia Dymitruk (Rostov), Jeanne de Mohrenschildt (Harbin, China, near the Siberian border), and George de Mohrenschildt (Mozyr, in southeastern Belorussia) veers between comprehension and miscomprehension, sometimes breaking down completely into incomprehension and aporia, as both sides struggle to comprehend what the other is trying to communicate to them. The Kennedy assassination literature should exhibit the greatest sensitivity in this regard, but for the most part it impatiently turns a blind eye.

Regarding (2), anyone looking to apply the standards of analytic philosophy to de Mohrenschildt’s manuscript in the hope of finding unambiguous “truth” is sure to come away with the impression that the author, even if he is sane, is at best absent-minded, more probably concealing some larger truth through digression and a focus on trivialities and possibly just dissembling ad nauseam. The problem here is that de Mohrenschildt’s mind was continental, not Anglo-American, a difference he himself points out on more than one occasion within the manuscript. He did not interpret the world, and what counted as “truth” for that matter, through the sort of interpretive prisms Anglo-Americans customarily use. His mode of argumentation is less formal, less deductive, and more narrative, more inductive. An example that
comes to mind here would be the French historian Fernand Braudel.\textsuperscript{51} The whole, the \textit{longue durée}, far exceeds any of the single parts that, taken singly, do not appear to amount to much and sometimes do not even appear to signify much of anything at all.\textsuperscript{52} Another example worth citing is the memoir of French UN official Jean Richardot, \textit{Journeys for a Better World}.\textsuperscript{53} Living in Haiti during roughly the same time as de Mohrenschildt, Richardot exemplifies the perspective that the professional and personal parts of one’s life were intertwined and inseparable. Thus he is as comfortable elaborating on his admiration of Haiti’s gingerbread architecture and the beauty of the country’s Caribbean sunsets as he is describing the savage and often irrational violence of Duvalier’s dictatorship.

Regarding (3), it is simply a mistake to apply, as so much of the Kennedy assassination literature appears to do, present-day sensibilities to someone who grew up in the turmoil of World War I, the Russian Revolution and Russian Civil War, and postwar Poland. The de Mohrenschildt family lost nearly everything to the Bolshevik regime. The precariousness and uncertainty of life in the Old World at this time is scarcely comprehensible to anyone living in today’s developed world. When he left Poland to study in Belgium in 1931, Europe was awash in political instability and ideological extremism. By the time de Mohrenschildt departed Belgium for America at the age of twenty-seven the pattern for the rest of his life was already laid: profound suspicion of authority, ambivalent cynicism toward any ideology or religion, and at-all-costs survival in the midst of seas of chaos. Judged externally his personal and professional conduct often suggested a life without any plan, living each day as if it were possibly his last. This would be an exaggeration, of course, but it does grasp an essential quality common to the refugee mind.\textsuperscript{54} Trust largely extended to those de Mohrenschildt could look in the eye and work with one-on-one. Everyone else, with trust unverifiable, could be treated as largely disposable. Respect was shown with a handshake, disrespect with its refusal.\textsuperscript{55} His professional conduct is amply discussed in the manuscript’s annotations, but by way of summation, in addition to his very considerable charm de Mohrenschildt wasn’t unwilling to raise his voice, to use intimidation, and both threaten and use legal action to get what he wanted. Regarding his personal life, though it is largely concealed in the present manuscript, written by a man well over sixty and on the cusp of retirement, evidence suggests that right up until his fifties de Mohrenschildt had the sexual appetite of a satyr and his conduct toward women, including his first three wives, was at times abysmal.\textsuperscript{56} To judge these behaviors as an indication of an amoral, sinister human being without
redeeming qualities while, for example, viewing President Kennedy’s many sexual escapades and ongoing drug use, or Robert Kennedy’s infidelity and almost breathtaking Machiavellian ruthlessness, as mere foibles—is the worst sort of presentism, even when it isn’t simply being hypocritical.

What is the manuscript really about then? When one looks at the material with sufficient care and patience, I would argue, the following four conclusions emerge.

First, it appears as if de Mohrenschildt was attempting to re-create or reenact the testimony he had provided to the Warren Commission in 1964. More than half the material—what is organized here as Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4—covers largely the same ground as de Mohrenschildt’s two-day testimony, particularly the second day. This material is reproduced in Appendix B. I have pointed out examples in the notes and the reader is invited to discover additional parallels. The narrative in the manuscript is, of course, somewhat revised and amplified. De Mohrenschildt draws additional material and details from the testimony of his wife, Jeanne, and daughter Alexandra, and his enduring friend Sam Ballen, but it is clear that he also incorporates snippets from many of the other members of the Dallas–Fort Worth White Russian community whose testimony he claimed saddened him, such as George Bouhe, Igor and Natasha Voshinin, Max Clark, Paul Raigorodsky, and, yes, Marina Oswald. He even tips his hand concerning this strategy within the manuscript itself:

> Reading all of this dirty laundry being aired in public I even had the perverse idea of writing a short book, assembling all these opinions and giving the book the title *I Arranged Kennedy’s Assassination*.

Stylistically the approach of the manuscript that was completed in the summer of 1976 is, I would argue, precisely this hypothetical book that de Mohrenschildt mentions in jest. The manuscript is a series of vignettes that blend and merge de Mohrenschildt’s thoughts—much like one of the watercolor paintings he was known for—with all these other testimonies into a narrative arc.

Second, and following from the first conclusion, the text is most definitely not meant to be a joke and is not a confession. It is a “retelling” of the Warren Commission testimony he came to regret more intensely with each passing year. In April 1964 the entire Haitian venture, a project years in the making, was at stake. Confident the whole matter of Oswald and the assassination would soon be forgotten and behind him, de Mohrenschildt for the
most part was all too willing as we now say to throw Oswald under the bus. Twelve years later, with his days as a high-profile wheeler-dealer well behind him, he wanted to provide a more realistic portrait. The conscious goal of the manuscript is to humanize Oswald, its unconscious goal to exorcise the despair that de Mohrenschildt felt was threatening to consume him. With regard to former, the text succeeds remarkably well. We read here an Oswald who lives and breathes, who possesses surprising nuance and is not the petrified caricature that over the last half century has assumed the status of a cultural cliché. Leaving aside the question of the accuracy of every last detail, it is a compelling alternative portrait. With regard to the latter, unconscious goal, time would demonstrate that writing the manuscript did little to comfort its author, who would outlive its completion by just a few months.

Even some fourteen years after first meeting Oswald, de Mohrenschildt was hesitant to acknowledge the warning signs that were present to the effect that his young friend was capable of committing murder. He sees the symptoms, but diagnosis eludes him; for the most part Lee’s background, personality, marriage, and politics appear to him as individual pieces to completely different puzzles. In the 1960s and 1970s the motives of a Lee Harvey Oswald could only be visualized through the funhouse mirrors of Cold War paranoia. De Mohrenschildt himself laments how these cookie-cutter cutouts—“Communist, traitor, misfit, insane killer”—had transformed Oswald the man into a dark, irrational, and incomprehensible menace of near-demonic proportions, but he could not articulate an alternative. In recent decades we have come to know a great deal more about how combinations of crushing poverty, preexisting mental health issues, marital and family stress, and/or social isolation can combine to trigger murderous outbursts, especially in young men. In today’s world Lee Harvey Oswalds are depressingly common. In the last decade alone one can cite as examples the homicidal rampages of Seung-Hui Cho at Virginia Tech (thirty-two dead, seventeen wounded), James Eagan Holmes in Aurora, Colorado (twelve dead, seventy injured), or Adam Lanza at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut (twenty-six dead). Looking back now over a half century, with the Cold War long since tossed into the dustbin of history, we are left with a young man whose wife had just given birth to a second baby, who had a history of job insecurity and terminations, and whose unemployment insurance had previously run out in a time before food stamps, Medicaid, or a host of other social services for the poor. On top of which he was a self-professed Marxist and anti-segregationist living in Dallas, Texas—arguably the beating heart of ultra-conservative America.57 Had it not been
for a presidential motorcade passing through town he probably would have wound up being just another “going postal” incident that would have been fortunate to receive more than thirty seconds on local television news.

Third, while de Mohrenschildt reserves judgment with regard to who was ultimately responsible for events in Dallas—whether Oswald alone, a conspiracy, or Oswald as part of a conspiracy—he emphasizes the Bay of Pigs as a starting point for understanding the Kennedy assassination. In 1976 there was far less primary source material available to a professor teaching at a small private college in the middle of Texas. Even the most studious and dedicated writers of the era faced significant hurdles accessing primary documents, many of which remained unknown and/or classified. To the ends of their lives George and Jeanne rejected the idea of Oswald being Kennedy’s assassin. Knowing Oswald as they did, as someone with no animosity toward the president, they could not envision a valid motive that would place him and his war-surplus Italian rifle in a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository. Without a motive to kill Kennedy, they reasoned, Lee could not have pulled the trigger on November 22, 1963. Having exhausted the possibility of explaining a logical motive, the de Mohrenschildts had reached an impasse. Initially, they drew on their memories to speculate that Oswald had simply snapped, that something they knew all too well—namely, Marina’s nagging and materialism—had pushed him over the edge. All they got for their efforts to express this hypothesis in their disjointed English was skepticism and derision, soon thereafter to be lampooned as the dimwitted proponents of the “washing machine theory” of the assassination. Eventually, like so many others before them, they too drifted toward explanations based in conspiracy. Influenced by foreign periodicals such as the left-wing L’Express, published in Paris, they had almost from the beginning spoken of a possible conspiracy. Originally, it was something akin to a joke, more of the outrageously incorrect antics of the anarchic Jeanne and jester George. But over time it was no laughing matter, and their assertions grew in seriousness. Once that happened the assassination conspiracy vultures were sure to circle over their heads without pause, looking for a meal. The manuscript, in its halting prose, criticizes these “scavengers from a poor man’s death”—little did its author realize that over the decades his own life, and death, would become similar carrion.

Fourth, the manuscript provides, though largely unconsciously, an alternative explanation that breaks the impasse of Oswald’s motive. The text suggests on multiple occasions that Oswald’s identity—never secure, always in flux—was exceedingly fragile. When he did not perceive him-
self as threatened, as he apparently did with the de Mohrenschildts and especially George, Oswald was almost remarkably ordinary, and familiar: a young man looking to understand the most important social and political problems of the time, searching to find a suitable occupation, a father who had perhaps married unwisely but who still loved his children. The manuscript at the same time clearly identifies those for whom Oswald reserved his wrath when his fragile identity did perceive a threat: those who presented a challenge to his masculine authority (Marina, FBI agent Hosty); those who represented an ideological danger to his idiosyncratic brand of Marxism (General Walker, former vice president Nixon); and those who represented insult or disrespect to his phantasmagorical self-constructed life narrative (Governor Connally, the Dallas–Fort Worth White Russians). President Kennedy, the manuscript emphasizes, was not threatening in any of these ways. With the answer to his impasse staring up at him from the text, de Mohrenschildt cannot bring himself to accept it:

Only some more logical and cynical writers mentioned the fact that there was no reason whatsoever in Lee’s action; but they approve the thesis that Lee was aiming at Governor Connelly [sic], whom he had reasons to dislike, but being a usual flop and f--- up, he killed Kennedy instead and only wounded Connelly [sic].

The thesis is too cold, too clinical, and too relentlessly cynical: the very sort of Anglo-American reasoning the mind of an Old World European such as de Mohrenschildt would have trouble fathoming, much less accepting. Unfortunately it may also be the most plausible answer. If Oswald was trying to kill anyone on November 22, 1963, it was most likely John Connally, not President Kennedy. He was at best a mediocre shot using an inferior weapon, one he had to rapidly assemble and whose scope there wasn’t time to properly sight. Only the fact that the vehicle was moving so slowly, in almost a straight line away from him, and innumerable, inexcusable security gaffes allowed the unthinkable to happen. From there, the many wheels of local, state, and federal bureaucracy went into full motion, largely to cover their own arrogance and careless ineptitude—and even that was a botched rush to judgment.

This, I would think, is the answer de Mohrenschildt’s manuscript was pointing toward though he himself was unwilling to concede it, out of friendship. Now whether or not that answer is correct is something read-
ers will have to decide for themselves. From the beginning there have been plenty of “disagreeable fools and dangerous question marks” surrounding November 22, 1963. Bertrand Russell’s “Sixteen Questions on the Assassination” left wide swaths of the official narrative in tatters, and it was merely one of the opening salvos. Fifty years later the findings of the Warren Commission are still the subject of intense criticism. But were its findings part of a conspiracy? De Mohrenschildt himself didn’t think so. What one sees in the aftermath of Kennedy’s death are not the immoral machinations of a grand and sinister alliance trying to, as de Mohrenschildt puts it, “promote a deliberate lie.” What one sees instead are, arguably, the machinations of an amoral superpower trying to conceal from its own people that alliances with organized crime, betrayal and murder of other heads of state, and the destruction of foreign governments, including democratically elected ones, regardless of the cost and the naked brutality involved had, by the early 1960s, become a matter of everyday policy and organizational routine. Death was the high cost of maintaining American global hegemony and the affluent style of living its citizens enjoyed. George de Mohrenschildt’s manuscript, with its direct discussion of the financial costs of Vietnam and the political costs of Watergate, along with its indirect references and allusions to then-in-progress investigations—such as the Church Committee, which was in the process of revealing the cold-blooded and murderous duplicity of agencies such as the FBI and the CIA—contains an embryonic understanding of this. Today, after two even more expensive wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, CIA assassination drone strikes in several countries, “enhanced interrogation,” the Patriot Act, Guantanamo Bay, Plan Columbia, NSA “data mining” of phone records, etc., etc., we know better. The empire wears no clothes.

Finally, this manuscript is the closing act in a personal tragedy. If there is a “patsy” in the text it is none other than George de Mohrenschildt himself. In today’s world the distance between the mainland United States and Haiti would have been no obstacle to a ravenous media—the aftermath of a presidential assassination would have seen journalists of every ilk descending on Port-au-Prince in a matter of hours, exposing and devouring in perhaps a few weeks every detail of the de Mohrenschildts’ lives and every statement they had ever made. If George and Jeanne had been so foolish to suggest the FBI was behind Kennedy’s murder, as they apparently did at an embassy function in Haiti shortly after the assassination, it would have wound up on someone’s Twitter account five minutes later. George would have quickly
“lawyered up,” as we now say, and would never have been so foolish as to testify before the Warren Commission without legal counsel. And he would have found an agent and a publisher for this manuscript, of that I am sure. He would have signed a contract with a major commercial press, received a hefty advance, gone on a book tour, given lectures on CSPAN and Book TV, made guest appearances on PBS and BBC America, and basked in the attention he so clearly enjoyed. Nero and Poppaea, the de Mohrenschildt’s Manchester Terriers, would probably have had their own Facebook account, with legions of fans following their every doing. Maybe the Oswald “hunter of fascists” photo winds up in an auction house, or even on eBay. The media, whose attention span grows ever shorter, would have become satiated and moved on, leaving the now-wealthy de Mohrenschildt free to build the house in northern California they had once hoped and planned to make their permanent home.

Sadly, the pace of life in the 1960s and 1970s was far, far slower than it is today. The attention the de Mohrenschildts received after Kennedy’s assassination was like a continuous background murmur, rising and falling and rising again in volume but never entirely granting them complete silence. George had persecution issues dating back to at least the late 1950s. Jeanne had serious issues of her own and a confrontational personality that was probably the last thing her husband needed in the wake of Kennedy’s assassination. Their behavior in Haiti after the assassination was imprudent in the extreme. Everyone who knew de Mohrenschildt in the early 1960s described his son’s death in 1960 from cystic fibrosis as psychologically devastating. The sense of loss after his daughter succumbing to the same disease in 1973, scarcely ever mentioned in the Kennedy assassination literature, can only have been equally strong.68 We can see indications her death was the catalyst for what would transpire during the final six months of his life. The remorse and despair slowly became cognitive static, the static grew and expanded until, in 1977, it blocked the voice of reason; hypothesis and then sheer fantasy began to blend and merge with memories, fact, and reality. And even at this late stage the limitations of de Mohrenschildt’s spoken English were being misunderstood, misinterpreted, and, in the case of Willem Oltmans and others, exploited. By March 29, 1977, the pressure, real and imagined, had become too much. “George told me he was tired of being hounded by the press on the Kennedy matter and was thinking of suicide,” Sam Ballen recalled in the late 1990s. “We spoke about depression as a defined illness. I convinced him to come to Santa Fe where we would hike the
Sangres, and a date was set. When he did not show up, I was prepared for the worst. The similarity to Hemingway’s final days was inescapable.”69 One is reminded of Tolstoy’s Memoirs of a Madman: “I am running away from something dreadful and cannot escape it. I am always with myself, and it is I who am my tormentor.” George de Mohrenschilhd had defiantly sown the wind his entire life; while he could not ever fully accept it, in Lee Harvey Oswald he had reaped the whirlwind.
These words,¹ among the last uttered in public by my friend Lee Harvey Oswald,² still echo in my memory and remind me of the terrible injustice that would have us believe he was the “lone assassin” responsible for killing President John F. Kennedy in November of 1963. That fateful month was a fairly uneventful one in Haiti, where I worked with my young geologist assistant Alston Boyd³ in an office located on Boulevard Harry Truman⁴ in the heart of Port-au-Prince. The office occupied a large room within a Quonset building⁵ belonging to the Haitian government, and we were kept there virtually incommunicado due to the presence of government maps and other “strategic information.”⁶ The tropical heat in Haiti dictated we begin our chores early in the morning and finish by two in the afternoon.

Alston and I drove to my beautiful house, the Villa Valbrune, overlooking Port-au-Prince in the area called the Lyle Estates,⁷ located just a block away from the presidential retreat.⁸ Like any self-respecting Haitian we ate a meal and took a siesta, then later in the afternoon changed and in the company of my wife Jeanne departed for a reception being held at the Lebanese Embassy.⁹ The usually animated streets were eerily deserted. “I feel trouble in the air,” Jeanne said. The air was balmy and still, the soldiers and Tontons Macoutes,¹⁰ or TMs as we used to call them, were absent. We could not hear any shots.¹¹ Arriving at our destination we greeted the Lebanese
ambassador and joined the crowd. George Morel, head of Pan American Airways in Haiti, walked directly up to us. “Didn’t you know the President was killed?” he said in a strained voice. At first we thought he was speaking of the President of Haiti, Docteur François Duvalier, who was my nominal boss. Noting our still blank expressions Morel explained, “President Kennedy was assassinated today.” My heart hoped it hadn’t happened in Texas and especially in our hometown of Dallas, but as Morel summarized what had transpired it became clear that it had indeed been in Dallas.

We left the embassy some time later, ourselves gloomy, but those around us did not seem to be too badly concerned with President Kennedy’s fate. As we drove away I said angrily, “If Kennedy had had his Tontons Macoutes around, this would not have happened.” It was the first but not the last time I would be critical of the services supposedly employed to protect the President of the United States. We traveled to the American Embassy, which was located near the seashore not far from my own office. The doors were wide open, and two marines stood opposite a book of condolences where American residents could sign their names as a gesture of reverence to the dead head of state. Approaching, we found the page blank; we were the first to sign it. We did not stay long, instead driving to the house of an old friend of mine, Valentin “Teddy” Blaque, who was an attaché at the American Embassy. His house was similar to ours, only more opulent with a large terrace overlooking the sparkling waters of Port-au-Prince Bay. The beautiful view belied the somber atmosphere. Several mutual friends were standing around, each looking at the other with stunned expressions that seemed to reflect my own feelings: “Why him? Why Kennedy?”

“For the first time we had a president who was young and energetic. And he was trying to solve the problems of the world,” Jeanne said sadly. “And he had to go . . .”

“And in Dallas,” I mused. Dallas was a conservative and somewhat provincial city, but successful and proud. We knew the mayor, the charming Earle Cabell, and many of the city fathers. Why there? “Who did it?” I asked Teddy.

“I just listened to the radio and a suspect was arrested already,” he replied.

An image flashed before my eyes, and I remembered Lee and his rifle with the telescopic site. Before I knew it the words had escaped my lips, “Could it be Lee?” No, it couldn’t be. Not Lee. It was impossible. But that was the name Teddy would say: Lee Harvey Oswald. And driving back home, in stunned silence, we thought of Lee and the predicament he must now be in.
Later, my wife and I made our deposition at the American Embassy. We did know the man who had been officially identified as the main suspect. We were also aware he owned a rifle. We would be happy to testify what we knew about him and about our relationship with him and his wife, Marina Oswald. But neither of us believed he was the assassin. And it was then that strange events began to transpire. A letter was sent by someone in Washington to the officials of the Haitian government urging them to drop me from the payroll and exile me as quickly as possible. Fortunately the existence of the letter became known to me, and thanks to good friends nothing happened. Later, little by little, my wife and I were ostracized by American Ambassador Timmons, followed by the American businessmen and government employees we had previously been on very good terms with and, finally, we learned that all our friends and even acquaintances in the United States were being investigated.

Then an FBI agent named Mr. W. James Wood appeared, wearing a gray flannel suit and sporting bright white teeth, trying to scare us off. Eventually in February 1964 we were officially invited to Washington, DC, to help the Warren Commission in its investigation. Although we felt we could contribute little, we went to testify. Despite assurances our long depositions

“We're Just a Patsy!”
were to remain confidential all three hundred pages, most of it irrelevant conversation, was printed and distributed. The text provided by myself and my wife exceeded the depositions of Marina and Lee’s mother, Marguerite, put together. Why? There are two possible explanations. The first was simply to waste the taxpayer’s money with boring and useless details, a cornucopia of gossipy, irrelevant stuff related to our private lives, half of which had nothing at all to do with our relationship with Lee. The second was to distract the attention of the American people away from those truly involved in the assassination of President Kennedy. Whatever the explanation, the story was just beginning. And all this occurred simply because my wife and I liked Lee and tried to defend him, and because Lee had said “I liked and admired George de Mohrenschildt.”
Early in the summer of 1962 rumors began to spread among the Russian-speaking people of Dallas and Fort Worth of an unusual couple—the Oswalds. The husband was supposedly a former American marine who had defected to the Soviet Union and lived in Minsk, the city where I had spent my childhood. He had returned to the United States, now married to a Russian wife. Although he supposedly had a reputation for being an unfriendly and eccentric character, I was curious to meet both of them and discover what their life in Minsk had been like.

Meeting Lee and His Wife

George Bouhe, an elderly refugee considered the “father superior” of all Russians in the Dallas–Fort Worth area, gave me the Oswalds’ address, and one September afternoon a friend of mine, retired air force colonel Lawrence Orlov, and myself drove from Dallas to Fort Worth. Fort Worth is a little more than thirty miles west of Dallas. Texas does have some lovely open spaces, but in the summer of 1962 the stretch of road separating the two cities was unpleasant and polluted, frequently smelling of sewage. After some searching we found the address, which turned out to be a shack on Mercedes Street in a semi-industrial, slummy area near a Montgomery Ward.
I knocked on the door and was met by a clean if tawdry young woman, who turned out to be Marina Oswald. Introducing myself and the colonel I explained that I had obtained their address from George Bouhe. Marina invited us inside and offered us some sherry, saying that Lee would soon be over. She spoke beautiful, melodious Russian, quite different from the bastardized version, full of Anglicized intonations and words, used by those of us who had lived in America for many years. We made small talk for a few minutes, sharing a few jokes; she had a pretty good sense of humor, yet beneath her charm I found the opinions she expressed pedestrian, even trite. We learned the couple had a baby daughter, named June.

It was then that Lee Harvey Oswald appeared and though I did not realize it at the time, my life would henceforth be forever intertwined with his. He wore overalls and clean workingman’s shoes. His job I would later learn was at the Leslie Welding Company. Yet even in this modest attire there was something extraordinary about him, and only someone who had never met Lee could have called him insignificant. I remember thinking, “There is something outstanding about this man.” Although he was average in appearance, medium sized with no distinguishing features save for attractive gray eyes, he showed in conversation both concentration and thoughtfulness. One could detect immediately a very sincere and forward man, one who had the courage of his convictions and who did not hesitate to express them. I was glad to meet someone such as him, as he reminded me of my youth in Europe where, as students, we discussed world affairs and our own ideas happily over beers, not caring about the time.

We spoke English first, and then, somehow, we switched to Russian. Lee spoke it very well, with only a slight accent. From time to time he glanced at the baby, and the tender expression he exhibited told me he loved her. Marina did not say very much.

“Doesn’t your wife speak any English?” I asked Lee.

“No, and I don’t want her to know English. I want her to continue speaking her own language. Russian is beautiful and I don’t want to forget it,” Lee explained, before adding with a deep conviction, “Russian literature is marvelous and the people I met in the Soviet Union were so warm and nice to me. I made many friends there.”

“And how about the Soviet government,” I asked.

“Well, that’s another story. The trouble with me is I always look for an ideal which probably does not exist.”

Lee glanced at Colonel Orlov. “Maybe your friend does not understand Russian. Let’s speak English then. You know I was a marine and I have
First Conversations with Lee

He smiled and added a few kind words in English to my friend.

“My wife speaks Russian and she would like to spend time with you, Marina, and the baby of course,” I said.

“I would like to but it will depend on Lee,” Marina answered.

“I am sure Lee will let you visit, and will come himself,” I replied. I felt a bond of friendship was already forming between the Oswalds and myself.

After this short conversation we shook hands and left. On the drive back to Dallas the colonel indicated he thought Marina beautiful and charming, though I found her less so. “But I found the ex-marine so much more interesting,” I said. I got the impression that my friend, while sympathetic to Marina, resented Lee’s offhandedness, his ironic smiles and especially his ferocious spirit of independence.

First Meetings with Lee

A few days after the trip to Fort Worth I received a call from Lee.

“Marina and I will come over tonight, if you don’t mind,” he said.

“Maybe I could drive to Fort Worth and pick you up?” I offered.

“No, thank you, we will come by bus,” he answered laconically.

At the time my wife and I lived in a pleasant area of Dallas called University Park, located a few blocks from Southern Methodist University, a conservative stronghold.14 The Oswalds, so different from the local society we were accustomed to, stepped off the bus along with their infant daughter, and we welcomed them into our home. Jeanne liked Marina immediately and offered to help her with her English. “Yes, I have to know the language,” Marina agreed. Her eyes darted about the décor of our modest home and then she added unexpectedly, “People have asked me why I like Lee, and I answer them: why did Lee like me?” Jeanne liked the humble nature of her remark and her sympathy for Marina increased.

Jeanne often participated in our discussions.15 Let me explain her background a little and clarify why she got along so fabulously well with Lee.16 Jeanne was a famous fashion designer before I met her and half-ruined her career with my frequent travel and adventurous deals as a petroleum consultant, not to mention our nearly year-long walking trip through Latin America.17 Jeanne’s childhood was spent in China, where her father had built a railroad—her family was well-to-do.18 Even though she had lived a luxurious childhood, she had from the beginning preferred to give rather than to receive. Social attitudes are unpredictable and do not depend on your
parents or on your environment. She remembered the Chinese as humble and kind people, dismayly poor, who hated to fight and rather insulted each other and stamped their feet. Even in huge families, violence was seldom seen. Far-Eastern subjects, both past and present, were interesting to Lee, who enjoyed discussing them with my wife. She told him of the Japanese invasion, formation of the puppet state of Mânzhōuguó\(^\text{19}\) and the ensuing cruelties,\(^\text{20}\) and, finally, of her subsequent flight from the Japanese to the United States. Lee contrasted her experiences of militaristic Japan with the present Japanese democracy,\(^\text{21}\) which he knew so well.

In the meantime Lee and I sat on a comfortable sofa and talked all evening. Now I want to tell you something which may seem foolish to anyone who isn’t a dog lover.\(^\text{22}\) At the time we had two lovely black Manchester Terriers, Nero and his faithful wife Poppaea. Nero had accompanied us on our long trip over the mountains of Mexico and Central America and saved our lives on several occasions; I can scarcely exaggerate how much intuition Nero developed during our travels and how easily he recognized friends from enemies. Poppaea was bought for him upon our return to the United States. Many of our friends and even our own children complained to us that our dogs were either unfriendly or totally indifferent to them. Well, during that first evening with the Oswalds our dogs did not express any interest in Marina or in baby June, but they \textit{were} fascinated by Lee. Nero especially showed his complete confidence and affection for him. He snuggled up to Lee and looked at him with affection, something he seldom did with anyone, not even to our close friends. He sensed that Lee was an utterly sincere person and was devoid\(^\text{23}\) of hatred. Poppaea also licked his hand in a rare display of affection.

Naturally I do not recall every last detail of our first long conversation,\(^\text{24}\) but in general I asked questions and he answered them. Lee did not have a trace of nasal Southern drawl—his was the voice of a thinking, refined individual.\(^\text{25}\) I never heard Lee use any profanity, in either English or in Russian. This was most unusual for a man of his background, i.e., the slums of New Orleans and Fort Worth and the United States Marine Corps. But do not conclude he was some effete weakling, as I know there is a widespread belief that if you do not swear, you are not a red-blooded American male. I myself am guilty of constantly cussing, but despite that the students with whom I associate happily these days at Bishop College\(^\text{26}\) consider me OK and a good guy.

I wanted to know what had made him go to the Soviet Union. He answered by telling me of his youth in New Orleans.
had been keenly aware of social and racial injustice. While his classmates were busy playing such red-blooded American sports as basketball or baseball, he read voraciously. Among the books that had made a deep impression on him was Marx’s *Capital*, a work that, he said, he borrowed from the Loyola University Library.

“What did you like about it?” I remember asking him.

“It made clear to me the intolerable fact of the exploitation of the poor by the rich,” was his reply.

“But,” I said, “Lee, you must have seen it all over the world: the weak and the poor are everywhere exploited by the powerful and the rich. Listen to this: two dogs meet at the crossing point between East and West Berlin. One is running away from capitalism, the other from communism. The capitalist dog asks, ‘why are you running away?’ and the Communist dog answers, ‘Because I can eat but I cannot bark.’ The Communist dog then asks, ‘why are you running away?’ and the capitalist dog answers, ‘If I bark I cannot eat.’”

Here I want to dispel any impression that Lee did not have a keen sense of humor. He laughed at my joke and offered a few that must have been circulating during the time he was in the Soviet Union.

“A Russian doctor had a parrot who was able to say ‘how do you do,’ ‘good night,’ etc. One hot evening the doctor left the parrot on the windowsill to cool off. A Russian *mujik* passes by and hears the parrot’s greetings. He takes his hat off and says: ‘excuse me, comrade, I thought you were a bird!”

He continued, “A strip-tease joint was opened in Moscow for the tourists. It was decorated and run just like in Paris, and lots of money was spent on this establishment. Yet it did not attract much trade. A state Economic Commission questioned the worried director. He explained: ‘I did my best, hired the best decorators, and imitated a place in Paris.’ ‘How about the girls?’ asked a member of the commission. ‘No trouble with them, they are all at least for thirty years good party members.’”

“As you know,” he said, “Russians grab all they can from their satellite countries. So one day at the meeting of the Communist Party in Rumania, one of the workers stood up and said: ‘Comrade Secretary, may I ask you three questions?’ ‘Go ahead,’ was the Secretary’s reply. ‘I want to know: what happened to our wheat, our petroleum, and our wine?’ ‘Well,’ said the Secretary, ‘It’s a very complex economic question; I can’t answer it immediately.’ A few months later the workers are holding the same type of meeting, and another comrade raises his hand and asks: ‘Comrade Secretary may I
If you want to be a revolutionary, you have to be a fool or have an inspiration.

Oswald (wearing sunglasses) in the courtyard of the Gorizont Electronics Factory, summer of 1960. US National Archives and Records Administration (Commission Exhibit 2625)

ask you four questions? ‘Shoot,’ says the Secretary. ‘I want to ask you: what happened to our wheat, our petroleum, our wine, and also what happened to the comrade who asked the three questions some time ago?’ Silence.”

We both laughed. “At least here in America we do not have to worry about being sent to a concentration camp,” I said.

“You are wrong,” answered Lee seriously. “Most of the prisoners, convicts in American jail are political prisoners, they are victims of the system.” Writing these words more than fourteen years later, I have read similar opinions in liberal books; Lee, I realize now, was way ahead of his time.31

I remember concluding our first long conversation by telling Lee, “If you want to be a revolutionary you have to be a fool or have an inspiration. Your actions will be judged by the success and failure of your life.”

Lee agreed.

Jeanne served a Russian dinner which Marina found delicious but Lee hardly touched. He was ascetic in his habits, was indifferent to meals, and didn’t like desserts. While we enjoyed our meal baby June slept quietly in bed, all wrapped up. Lee looked tenderly at her. That night we learned a lot
about him, for example, that he neither drank nor smoked and objected if others, especially his wife, did. Since neither my wife nor I smoked and we drank very little, he liked us and considered that we were on his side. My wife had an elevated notion of Russian hygienic practices and those of Soviet youth in particular, so she was appalled to learn the baby had received none of the usual injections given to an infant, and that Marina, whose teeth were bad, \(^{32}\) would pick up the pacifier from the floor and place it in her own mouth before giving it back to the baby. “Your infected teeth have to be removed as soon as possible,” she told Marina. When Marina objected that she didn’t have any money and couldn’t speak English, Jeanne promised to help her.

After dinner Lee and I returned to the sofa.

“I served in the Marine Corps not because I was a patriot, but because I wanted to get away from the drudgery and to see the world,” he explained.

“Did you like the service?”

“Not particularly. But I had time to study, to read, and indeed we traveled a lot.”

“You told me you lived in Japan. How did you wind up being there?”

“Just an accident of Marine Corps duty. The military duty was boring and stupid. But fortunately I moved around, began visiting places where young people meet, and I established contacts with some more progressive thinking Japanese. And it was this that led me to Russia eventually. \(^{33}\) I also learned of other, Japanese, ways of the rich exploiting the poor—semi-feudal. The industrial giants act paternalistically yet exploit the workers—proletarians. The wages in Japan were ridiculously low.”

“Well, it’s changing now,” I said. “Say, Lee, was it in Japan that you got your discharge from the Marine Corps?”

Lee became touchy and did not like to elaborate on this subject. “I had to work to support my mother.” \(^{34}\)

But as we all know Lee did not go back to the United States to support his mother but went instead to the Soviet Union. He obviously used the money obtained from his discharge to make this trip. He first went to Western Europe and then drifted to the USSR via Finland, as I recall. \(^{35}\) Lee’s discharge had originally been honorable but was later changed to an undesirable discharge, and he hated to talk about it and considered it unfair to him. \(^{36}\) This may explain his hatred of John Connally, \(^{37}\) who was Secretary of the Navy at the time of the discharge.

The subject of his discharge was not a part of our conversation that night. He talked about the Soviet Union. “I got to Moscow and stayed there

First Conversations with Lee

11
until the Russians had confidence in me and gave me a permit to work.” He did not mention to me that he had tried to commit suicide when the Soviet authorities first refused him entry, cutting his wrists.38

Marina joined the conversation, adding, “Lee, you threw your passport in the face of the American consul and you said you renounced your citizenship.” Lee went on talking about his impressions of Minsk because he knew of my early childhood experience with the city. He gave me a general description and then added candidly, “I was assigned to work in Minsk without any particular reason, in a television factory, possibly because I had a little electronics training in the Marines.”

“Tell me more about the countryside,” I asked him.

“Svislach River40 is pretty clean. We used to go by row-boats to the forest nearby to picnic on the weekends. The forests are beautiful there, huge pine trees, clean grass, full of all kinds of berries.”

I remembered the Minsk cathedral and several other picturesque churches as well as the main building, police headquarters, which housed the GPU, NKVD, and MGB.41 My father42 had spent several months there and almost died of starvation before finally being sentenced to permanent exile in Siberia. These childhood memories and the resentment that went along with them had disappeared by the time Lee and I spoke. He gave me a perfect description of all these landmarks, still present and unchanged. There were many new factories, however, one of which had been his place of employment.

“Did you like your job?” I asked.

“The pay was sufficient, about a hundred rubles a month, average for the Soviet Union. I could live on it. My apartment and all the utilities were furnished by the factory for a nominal fee, along with my medical insurance, and so on.” He went on to recount the prices for bread, produce, milk, and meat, which were reasonable, and for clothing, which were outrageously high. “Sometimes I ran short of meat, but you know I am not a big eater; it was of no importance to me.”

Marina listened in and gave more precise information, especially complaining about the high cost of clothing and shoes. I could tell she was the practical one.

“You must have been somewhat privileged,” I suggested, “being a foreigner.”

“Butter and meat were beyond my reach,” Marina said bitterly, “but you foreigners could afford those luxuries.”

Lee generally did not complain about his life in the Soviet Union, but Ma-
rina quite frequently did. I do not know how sincere she was. She considered me a capitalist and I sensed her complaints were an effort to please me. She was ready to continue talking more but since she was from Leningrad, a town I was not familiar with, I interrupted her to ask, “But how did the other workers, the Russians, live in Minsk?”

“Not too well,” Lee replied. “Usually one roof for a couple, community kitchens and lavatories. This led to quarrels, gossip, and jealousy; a rather dismal situation. But what does it matter if everyone is in the same boat, if everyone suffers? No rich exploiters like here in the United States, no great contrasts between the rich and the poor.”

That night as I recall Marina announced that Lee was going to be laid off from his job at the welding company. It was a poor job anyway, the hours were long, the wages minimal, and the conditions unhealthy. Lee never complained, rather that duty was left to Marina, who was constantly dissatisfied. While Lee’s mind was of a stoical, philosophical type, the air of American prosperity bothered Marina. She was envious of other people’s wealth and well-being. I suppose this is why Lee got along so well with the other Russians he met in the Soviet Union. Russians do not mind suffering and will even go hungry yet be happy to spend entire nights talking and speculating on esoteric matters.

Why Lee and I Disliked the FBI

Recently, it was established that the FBI had concealed and destroyed a letter from Lee Harvey Oswald written to their Dallas office before the assassination. I do not think we have an exact text of this letter, but the newspapers reported Lee was extremely angry at the way the FBI kept annoying him and his wife and therefore were making his normal pursuit of life impossible. This explains, naturally, why in our conversations Lee had such a dim view of this “great” institution and its leader, J. Edgar Hoover. I saw Hoover once, in La Jolla, California. I remember that Jeanne and I were there to visit a partner of mine, Colonel Edward J. Walz, who had a ranch nearby and also made some investments in the oil ventures. In the evening, having dinner at one of the best motels, facing the sea, I recognized Mr. Hoover, sitting together with some of our oil magnates and behaving in such an obsequious and distasteful manner, as if he were a servant of these very wealthy people. And he looked like a pompous waiter or, possibly, head waiter. I knew some of the people sitting with him and a meeting could have been very simply arranged, and thus a lot of difficulties would have
been avoided for both of us in the future. But something restrained me from approaching the group, and I did not do it.

Jeanne did not have any special reason to like or dislike the man, but I had a previous experience with the FBI which was comically ridiculous and could have ended badly for me. Because of it, too, have a personal grudge against the FBI. My early scrape with them dates from June of 1941, soon after my arrival in the United States. At that time I was very young, had some money which I brought from Europe, had made a little more in this country, and now I found myself about to be drafted into the US Army. But, instead, the doctors revealed that I had very high blood pressure and declared me unfit for service. I still suffer from this high blood pressure, so really I owe my life to the good American doctors who had discovered it so early. Now I can keep it under control.

Frankly, I was not in a very militaristic mood at the time. The Germans had saved my father from the Russians. We de Mohrenschildts are of so-called Baltic descent, which means a mixture of people of Scandinavian,
German, French, and other lineages, descendants of the knights who had conquered Estonia, Latvia, Finland, and even parts of Russia. Now, many Balts were German oriented, and I had relatives of this type, but personally I was French-oriented. I also had spent two painful years in the Polish Military Academy and later spent time “maneuvering” on horse-back around the Soviet border, a rather dangerous occupation. So I found myself about to be drafted in the United States Army and did not feel very enthusiastic at the prospect of starting in boot-camp all over again.

At that time, I was not yet an American citizen but a resident of New York and madly in love with a young Mexican widow whom we shall call Señora L. After meeting her in New York, I asked a Brazilian friend who knew Señora L., “I am madly in love with her, shall I marry her?”

“If you marry her, you will be unhappy. If you do not marry her, you will be unhappy also,” answered my friend smilingly.

Of course, he was absolutely right. But still we were madly in love with each other. She had been brought up in Europe and lived there most of her life, thus she had a lack of knowledge of her own country. And so, she invited me to drive with her across the United States to Mexico, which she would explore with me. She spoke very little English, and I very little Spanish, so we communicated in French, which probably made us most suspicious to the FBI! Or maybe someone denounced us. We both had enemies. Anyway, our delightful trip in a new convertible Chrysler down the Eastern seaboard, then along the Gulf of Mexico, was rudely interrupted. This happened on June 3 near Corpus Christi, Texas, where we had rented an apartment in the Nueces Hotel using fictitious names. We left the hotel at Aransas Pass early to go to the beach at Corpus Christi and spent a delightful day there. I like to paint watercolor landscapes with beautiful female bodies in the foreground, and I made several sketches.

Driving back from the beach, we were stopped on a deserted road by a bunch of people who we plainly thought were American gangsters. We had little money with us, and the car was insured in case it was stolen, so we stopped without too much fright. The characters identified themselves: they were FBI agents who had taken us for German spies observing United States coastal fortifications.

When I was telling the story to Lee, he could not stop laughing. “This is so typical of the FBI. Taking you into custody, at that time you were a reserve officer in an Allied Army, driving along the coast with a beautiful Mexican woman, talking French to her, and painting,” he guffawed. “You were a typical ‘German’ spy.”

First Conversations with Lee
But, dear reader, do not laugh at the FBI’s ingenuity. After having verified our papers and listened to angry Señora L. shrieking in Spanish, they followed us back to the hotel and inspected our luggage. Only then did the agents realize they had made a foolish mistake. I even understood that some of them had followed us all the way from New York (once again at great expense to the American taxpayer), so the mistake was a very cold one. Lacking any evidence I was a German spy, they then accused me of an infraction of the old Mann Act. The Mann Act prohibits, still does, crossing the border from one state to another with a woman who is not your wife for the purpose of committing a licentious act.

Of that we certainly were guilty; we had passed through dozens of states on the way to Mexico and committed dozens, maybe hundreds, of licentious acts. However, we were not put in jail. We just had to sign some papers declaring that we were not married. After all that we were finally allowed to proceed to the Mexican border. The two of us felt as if someone dirty put their filthy hands in our very personal affairs. After our return Señora L. registered a strong complaint with the Mexican ambassador in Washington and much later received apologies for the actions of the FBI agents.

As far as I am concerned, five years later, when I was applying for United States citizenship in Denver, an FBI agent came to the hearing and reopened the case, accusing me of immorality and of a flagrant infraction of the Mann Act. I had already passed my citizenship examinations without a single mistake and was holding an important position with a group of oil companies. So I had to get a lawyer to defend me. My lawyer threatened the FBI agent with a personal damage suit in the amount of a million dollars, for damage done to my reputation. And so, the Mann Act was quickly forgotten, the judge laughed at the FBI story, and I was made an American Citizen. Maybe not first class, because I was naturalized, but a citizen still.

And Lee concluded, “And so you lived forever afterwards as a happy naturalized American citizen.”

“You don’t realize, Lee, how important it was for me to be a citizen, as I became after the war a man without a country, a ‘heimatlos.’”

“I guess it’s better to be without a country than to live in a country like this, run by the FBI,” was Lee’s bitter conclusion.

I guess in these days of open immorality and pornography staring at you from magazine racks and bookstore shelves, nobody would be accused of breaking such an antiquated law as the Mann Act. It’s probably buried for good. Even so, I still would like to find out someday what kind of a puritanical, hypocritical, son of a bitch this Mann was.
Further Conversations with Lee, 1962

The next time the Oswalds came to visit us we began speaking of Minsk again. I reminisced that when I was five years old my father used to take me to the forest, and I helped him as best as a child can to cut down large pine trees. It was a tough job and my father, who had never been a physically able man, constantly hurt himself. Once he jammed his finger so badly that the bone broke and the finger remained useless for the rest of his life. Surprisingly, I grew adept at swinging an ax and was a capable tree-cutter.

“Is that lovely forest north of town still in existence?” I asked. Lee confirmed that it was.

“Yes, I used to go there frequently, by bus, with my fellow workers. We took food along and spent the whole day talking freely. I explained the United States to them, and they informed me about life in Russia.”

I promised Lee I’d give him introductions to a few influential people because I wanted him and his family to move away from the gruesome part of Fort Worth they were currently living in. It was my hope the other members of the Russian community would help him also, and I told him so.

“Thanks a lot, I can take care of myself, I don’t want those creeps. I shall find something,” he answered gruffly. This was an example of Lee’s independent nature. He refused help, even objected to it when it was offered. Rather than be indebted to someone, he preferred to suffer on his own. While Marina was usually a lot of fun, and laughed easily, Lee was usually serious and did not think life a laughing matter. But if he happened to be in a good mood, he was an excellent companion, quite capable of laughing at your jokes and remembering political jokes, which he told well.

“Do you know the one about an America tourist carrying a small transistor radio in Moscow?” he asked me.

“No, I don’t know the story.”

“Well, the Muscovite stopped the American and said: ‘We make them much better than you do. What is it?’”

We both laughed. I then offered a joke of my own.

“What is the difference between capitalism and socialism?” He did not know. “Capitalism makes social mistakes and socialism makes capital mistakes.”

Lee countered with, “A Russian Commissar who has died is asked where he would like to go: to a capitalist hell or a Communist hell. The Commissar answers, ‘I would like to go to the capitalist hell, I am so tired of a Communist hell.’”

First Conversations with Lee
I then told Lee a few jokes about President Kennedy.

“President Kennedy tells a group of businessmen: ‘The economic situation is so good that, if I weren’t your president, I would invest in the stock market right now!’ And the businessmen answer him in unison: ‘So would we if you were not our president.’”

We both laughed. I told another joke.

“Kennedy had a terrible nightmare. He wakes Jackie up: ‘Honey, what a terrible thing. I dreamed I was spending my own money, not the government’s!’”

Again we laughed but without resentment. We both liked President Kennedy. I told one more joke.

“President Kennedy runs to his mother in the middle of the night. ‘Mama, Mama, help! Bobby is trying to run my country.’”

Lee did find a job to replace the one at the welding factory. It was at Taggart’s Reproduction Company, enlarging photos, posters, and maps. He found it through the Texas Employment Agency without help from anyone. It was a good job for him as he had been interested in photography for a long time. I guessed his interest went back as far as his time in the Marine Corps. He brought a good camera from the Soviet Union and took excellent pictures with it. Later he would show me some very impressive enlargements he had made himself. They were in black and white as he did not have the advanced knowledge needed to develop and enlarge color photographs. The job did not pay well, however, and he began to trust me more, to the point where he accepted an introduction to a successful businessman-banker, Sam Ballen. Ballen owned, among many companies, a large reproduction outfit for maps, electronic logs, and records. Unfortunately, the meeting did not go well and there was a mutual dislike. To my friend, Lee was a radical and a maverick, and to Lee, my friend Sam was an ordinary, bourgeois man with no redeeming features.

Our first evenings with the Oswalds were spent in conversation and discussions, and we got to know each other very well. Before Lee got his new job, I asked my daughter Alex and my son-in-law Gary Taylor to help the Oswalds move to Dallas. The Taylors went to visit the Oswalds in Fort Worth and immediately offered Marina and the baby the opportunity to stay with them. Whatever furniture they had could be stored in their garage. Marina accepted their generous offer. The Russian colony collected a small amount of money for Marina and the care of the baby June. Lee did not know about it, he would not have accepted any charity, so it was done secretly. Lee stayed for a short time in the apartment in Fort Worth and then
moved into a small room at the YMCA in Dallas, close to his job. During Marina’s stay at my daughter’s place my wife Jeanne drove her to Baylor Hospital, where they removed her decayed teeth. But this short separation did not prevent Lee from coming to visit us himself, alone.

At the time my wife and I knew Lee the thought that he might one day be a famous/infamous figure in history was the furthest thing from our minds. His visits at this time were very frequent. Sometimes he would stay for only a short time, while other times he would remain for the entire evening. A few of our half-serious, half-joking conversations remain in my memory.

“You are an extremely sincere person Lee,” I told him during one of his visits. “You do not lie, even to yourself." Most of the people I know are the opposite of you. They put up a front, they mislead, they deceive and lie, even when thinking.”

“I guess it’s dangerous to be that way. I know I make a lot of enemies,” he acknowledged. “But what the hell. My position is that I am afraid of a very few things in life. I am not cautious.” He smiled. “I am not a turkey who lives only to become fat.” And he showed me his emaciated belly. He was becoming very thin.

“Lee, your way of life is so un-American, it scares me to think of what may become of you.”

“It is true,” he admitted, “I am probably committing a sin in not being interested in possessions or money. When a rich man dies, he is like a prisoner, his possessions chains. I will die free, death will be easy for me.”

“Stop talking about death, you are only twenty-two,” I told him. “Regarding your attitude towards money and possessions I couldn’t agree more with you. You would rather do something remarkable than drive a Cadillac. I am the same way.”

“Life for me,” continued Lee, “is like a hungry crocodile. I’d better defend myself. I have to defend myself against the stupidity of this world. It is enormous! Life must be the work of a perfect idiot. Or maybe the stupidity, like breaking of the atom, is self-perpetuating?”

Not too bad for a twenty-two-year-old American proletarian and high school dropout, I thought.

“Lee, you have an original mind.”

“Thank you,” he said. “I do not often hear compliments. But let me tell you another reason why I despise the money-loving middle class. Such people are simply stupid, not serious—they attract crooks and adventurers. And so you hear how often they are sheared of their wool, like sheep, by various financial schemers.”

First Conversations with Lee
“Diderot,” I said, thinks very much like you. “You have nothing—I have very little now, so a real friendship is possible between us. We are sincere with each other.”

Lee agreed.

“Another thing Diderot said,” I continued, “was that he was very happy being poor and living in a shack. When he achieved opulence and found a nice apartment in Paris, he knew he was going to die.”

“The philosophers talk, but you did it,” Lee said, sounding envious.

“This trip of yours through Latin America: what freedom! Traveling on foot over 3,600 miles of tough trails. This demanded a complete change in life—willingly, suddenly, and for this you needed an extraordinary moral audacity.”

“This time it is me who wants to thank you, Lee. The trip was very satisfying to both Jeanne and me. But do not exaggerate: this was an act of desperation rather than audacity after the death of my only son.”

Becoming Close Friends

From time to time my wife would prepare a special Russian or French dinner for the Oswalds, always keeping in mind that both of them were undernourished. I would talk to Lee during these occasions, often late into the night. Although he unquestionably had some unpleasant memories attached to his life in the Soviet Union, such as the slashing of his wrists, Lee was never hostile or upset about his experience there. He spoke of his co-workers in a tone both humble and engaging. “They were hospitable, friendly, and sincere, invited me to their homes, fed me from their meager supplies, and we frankly discussed all the same subjects we do here. He also mentioned there were other foreigners living there, some Cuban students and one family from Argentina; the father of the family was an experienced engineer, and it was apparent Lee had great respect for him.

“Did anyone tell jokes about their regime?” I asked.

“Here is one I remember,” Lee said. “An American worker comes to the Soviet Union and he sees big apartment complexes. He asks, ‘To whom do they belong?’ ‘To the state,’ comes the answer. ‘How about these factories and the big black cars?’ ‘They belong to the state also.’” Lee smiled. “The Russian worker comes to visit the United States. He asks, ‘These huge factories, to whom do they belong?’ ‘To the capitalists,’ comes the fast answer. ‘Ah-ha,’ says the Russian, ‘This is terrible!’ Then he notices nice suburban
homes and new cars. He asks, ‘To whom do these belong?’ ‘To the workers,’ comes an immediate answer.”

I then asked Lee, “Did you ever hear the one about a Soviet worker who was wandering from one factory to another asking, ‘Is there a place that would pay as little as the small amount of work I intend to do?’”

“That’s a rather vicious joke,” Lee replied, clearly not amused. “Soviet workers work almost as hard as here and certainly get paid much less.” He then added, “Nobody in the Soviet Union tried to intimidate me or influence me. But I encounter these tendencies here in America. Nobody ever tried to make a Communist out of me. I was sympathetic, but I never joined the party.” I had no way of knowing if he was telling the truth about not joining the Communist Party, but I thought he was speaking on the level with me.

“And what were your living conditions there,” I asked.

“Not bad at all, ample meals, clean surroundings, good companionship.”

“And the pay?”

“Sufficient. The apartment cost me five percent of my pay, and I don’t eat much, as you know. With Marina’s additional salary we could manage quite well. Clothing was expensive but adequate, but I am not interested in stylish clothes. Of course the Cubans dressed to kill,” he smiled. I thought that Marina must have missed the good clothes.

“How about transportation,” I asked.

“I couldn’t afford a motorcycle, but I like to walk and the public transportation system was cheap and good.”

Jeanne, who had been listening in, asked a question of her own. “What was most annoying about the Soviet Union?”

“Those endless, endless meetings we had to attend after work, listening to those deadly, monotonous speeches. You were lucky if you were in the back and could take a nap. We listened to those bureaucratic outpourings half-dazed, like children during a boring lesson. Then we voted, rather indifferent, on trivial issues. Later we would file out, exhausted, and return home. And,” Lee smiled, “we never received any extra pay for the hours lost, though we certainly deserved it.” I nodded in approval, as I would also hate wasting my time on such meetings.

Lee spoke frequently to me of his interest in women, talking mainly of the daughters of the Argentine engineer who “were so pretty” and so friendly to him. He bragged amusingly and somewhat naïvely of his conquests while in the Soviet Union. Here in the United States, however, Lee certainly wasn’t a lady’s man. He felt depressed and confined. I think he more than occa-
sionally regretted having left Minsk. And why not? He was a foreigner, he acted freely, and he looked pleasant. His interest in the Russian people was warm and genuine. I can see how he might have been a Casanova among the Russian women.

Marina herself admitted one day, “He was something out of the ordinary. He looked like an American, was easygoing, loose and alert—not like the other men.” That Lee was a perfectly normal and well-adjusted individual while in Minsk was something she insisted frequently. “The only trouble with him was his interest in books—serious books—politics and discussions, rather than sex.”

Now you might find it surprising that Marina would share confidential matters about her relationship with Lee, but she was extremely close with Jeanne; my wife would relay the information to me. “Lee only rarely has sex with me,” she admitted, continuing, “about once a month, and he is in such a hurry that I do not get any satisfaction. It’s most frustrating.”

But for the most part we talked with the Oswalds of their lives in the Soviet Union. We soon acquired the distinct impression that Marina wanted a richer and materialistically more rewarding life than the one they shared in Minsk. It was she who convinced Lee to go to the American Embassy, to ask for the return of his passport and for money to allow them to return to the United States.

I am often asked, with a great deal of suspicion, why someone such as myself, a man with several university degrees, fairly good financial and social standing, someone with friends among the rich of the world, would become a friend of a “maladjusted radical” like Lee Harvey Oswald. As I hope the reader will begin to appreciate there were attractive aspects to Lee’s personality. I have already mentioned his straightforwardness, honesty, and desire to be liked and appreciated. I was fortunate to have reached an age advanced enough not to give a damn what others thought of me. I chose my friends because they appealed to me. And Lee did.

It never occurred to me at the time that Lee might be an agent of any country, including the United States, despite his having mastered a difficult language like Russian so well that he had just a trace of an accent. Lee was simply too outspoken and naive. When I was working in Venezuela in the 1940s for the company owned by William F. Buckley Sr., Pantepec Oil, I met Foma Trebin, the Soviet ambassador. Before World War One he had been a roustabout for Nobel Oil, and my uncle had been a director for that company. He knew my name and was very friendly with me. We spent many an evening talking over vodka. As a result he suggested he would
offer me a contract to work in the Soviet Union. But after listening to my frequently outspoken opinions he changed his mind, telling me, “My friend, you talk too much, you criticize too much. You would be a babe in the woods in my country and would end up in Siberia.” So in this way, too, I was similar to Lee.

Occasionally Lee’s constant search for truth, for the answers to the mysteries of life, seemed tragic and disturbing to me. At the same time these traits led me to believe it would be highly improbable that any government would try to make an agent of such a man. His perpetual self-inquiry, self-denial, and self-doubt, mixed with uncertainty, worried him. But I told him not to worry, in my opinion doubt, uncertainty and constant searching were the essence of youth and indicative of an exuberance of life. A strong desire for adventure was another element that motivated Lee’s personality. It was why he became a United States marine, and why he frequently switched jobs. Routine was deadly to him, though when he possessed a job that suited him, he seemed fairly happy.

Even before the assassination I was often asked, “How do you get along so well with Lee Oswald?” I would reply, “In my life I have done many things. I was often a promoter, an originator of ideas. So I like new ideas, even if they appear strange and outlandish. I enjoy meeting people of all stripes, and while I might evaluate their thoughts I do not criticize them.”

Later, after the assassination and when I was in hot water because of my relationship with Lee, a friend of mine testified, “George always liked stray dogs and stray people.”

And it was true: many people considered Lee a miserable misfit, an insult to the American way of life, and completely disregarded him. A Russian refugee living in Dallas told me once “I am scared of this man Oswald, he is paranoid.” I defended Lee, replying to him “Paranoid or not, he is as intelligent as you are. Listen to him, there is a lot in what he says.”

Probably to annoy Lee, the members of the Russian refugee community, and some ultra-conservative Americans, showered Marina with gifts and gave her a great deal of attention. She received over a hundred dresses, and for their baby June they received a new crib, a carriage, and a lot of toys. Since she could not speak English with Americans, their attention was wasted effort. But the gifts and attention the Russians gave Marina unquestionably annoyed Lee. At the time he did not want Marina to learn English. She knew only two words in English—“yes” and “no”—and if she went shopping on her own, she had to point out the articles she wanted. “It’s very egotistical on your part, Lee,” Jeanne told him. “You have to let

First Conversations with Lee
her study English so she can communicate with people other than the Russian refugees. You cannot keep her a recluse.” Marina certainly threw oil on the fire, bragging about the gifts and talking about the success of some of the donors, who owned both their own homes and two automobiles. Unquestionably this annoyed Lee, and the more people gave to Marina, the more disturbed, no maddened, he became. He declined invitations to these “benefactors”’ homes and was often rude to them. The consequences were very sad for their family. As for ourselves, we continued our good relationship with the Oswalds, even as we saw their relationship gradually deteriorating. I became even nicer to him. Never kick a man who is down, help him—that is what I believe. Yes, Lee’s actions and sensitivities annoyed me at times, but I did not show resentment and tried instead to find solutions for him and his wife.

One day Lee brought me a typewritten manuscript of his experiences in the Soviet Union. He was interested in publishing them in the form of an article in a magazine or possibly developing them into a book. The few typed pages did not add much to what he had already told me, and the information held my interest only because I was familiar with the locale; anyone unfamiliar with Soviet Minsk was unlikely to find the material interesting. But he thought it important to seek me out because he knew I had published many articles in Europe, and in the United States I had written some theater reviews for Variety magazine. As I looked at the pages, Lee sat on the sofa and looked hopefully at me.

“What do you think of this?” he asked.

“Remember, I’m not a professional writer—I was just lucky enough to have some articles published. Your story is simple and honest, but it is very poorly written. It lacks any sensational revelations, and for any reader other than myself it would be pointless. Personally, I like it, because I know Minsk, but how many people know where Minsk is? And why should they have interest in your experiences? Tell me.”

“Not many,” Lee agreed mildly.

I didn’t mention, in order not to offend him, that his grammar was poor and the syntax was abominable. Not to mention those long, pompous words he used. Lee could be amusing when he used difficult English terms like charisma, politico-mania, extravaganza, elitism, dialectical materialism, etc. We would laugh together about his use of such words, the exact meaning of which eluded him. They were the result of his poor formal education. The one thing that spoke in his favor was his sincerity and his obvious good will to inform correctly.
“If you add some sensational, detective-story-type details, include a beautiful female spy, depraved policemen, and if you depict all Russians as degenerate monsters, then your story will be published.”

“No thank you,” Lee said proudly. “I do not want to tell lies. My purpose is to improve Soviet-American relations.” And he added quickly, “People here should know how decent and generous Russians are. How well they treated me, a simple American ex-marine, with kindness and generosity. I did not find anything ‘monstrous’ in Soviet Russia.”

“Personally, I agree with you,” I assured him. “You talk about some individuals you met there. It’s good and factual, and they are decent people. But who is interested in ‘comrade this’ or ‘comrade that’ or in refugees from Argentina or cheerful Cuban students?”

Lee agreed, and I handed him back his manuscript. The same typewritten pages were shown to me, for identification, by the Warren Commission lawyer, and they were printed in the Warren Commission Report. So Lee’s wish to have them published came true, if only after his death.