

Before the Silence Came: Lee's Last Telephone Calls

Please note: The writing of this book, including the reconstruction of the telephone calls I received (below) is based on principles I learned at the feet of Luis Urrea, 1999 American Book Award winner, whose works *Across the Wire*, *By the Lake of Sleeping Children*, and *Nobody's Son* were written based on his personal experiences as a blonde, blue-eyed half Mexican who has lived with and fought prejudice and violence on both sides of the Mexican-American border.

In Urrea's "Creative Non fiction" courses taught at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, I learned how to better recreate my memories into the most accurate reconstruction of the actual events. Urrea's creative nonfiction works successfully bring to life his own extraordinary experiences, and include reconstructed dialogues. I have used Urrea's methods in reconstructing the events between April and December of 1963 in that same manner.

Further, in 1998 at The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, I also had the opportunity to study additional techniques of reconstruction of events and the writing of nonfiction narrative under the tutelage of Dr. Ernest Gaines, a world-renowned writer whose based-on-true-life works include *The Sky Is Gray*, *A Gathering of Old Men*, and *A Lesson before Dying*, a recent novel of choice of Oprah Winfrey. Dr. Gaines' thoughts and comments concerning my own work have helped me to better present my own based-on-true-life narrative.

And finally, my experience as a newspaper reporter in the Houston area for a handful of years was important in helping me to learn how to report events as accurately as possible. Of course, nobody is perfect, and I do not mean to imply that ALL my recollections have been recounted here, since every time somebody questions me, it may remind me of something I had forgotten. Lee's own natural reticence also forced me to sometimes guess what he really meant.

Years have passed, but sometimes it seems I heard his voice only last night. Years have passed, but many elements of the last telephone calls, the last times I heard Lee's voice, remain embedded in my soul, never to be forgotten.

Getting them out on paper has been painful. I've had nightmares reliving them.

I have already mentioned part of the telephone call of October 25th, but there was a great deal more that occurred during this call. I received this call, as best as I can remember, while still at work. I was on the phone more than an hour, but I had provided an excuse for myself, knowing this call was coming, and it would be a long one. Lee had missed a post call, and could not miss another without changing the call pattern, so I was certain he would call me at the earliest opportunity, which he did. He, himself, was supposedly "still at work" when he called me, even though he wasn't even in the book depository building at this hour, since he was using a payphone in downtown Dallas.

So much had happened since we had last spoken, and between pieces of information, we kept making our little comments to each other. We had developed our own love language, which would have sounded incomprehensible, I suppose, to anyone listening in, since some of it was in Russian.

Eventually, I was able to tell Lee I was sorry I'd missed his birthday, and he said gently to me,

“My birthday present was Rachel. Noegan to tell me why he’d been so busy he’d missed our scheduled call. It had started earlier in the week when Michael Paine asked him to go to a patriotic rally of ultra right-wingers, in order to hear (ret) Gen. Edwin Walker speak. However, Lee curiously did not give me Walker’s name. He only told me that he had gone to hear “a notorious right-winger” and that Paine had acted “fascinated” with the man. Michael Paine was no ordinary fellow. He had been doing research with atomic energy, had built Van DeGraaf generators, and was doing research on helicopters for bell helicopter. He was a brilliant man who has downplayed his brilliance, I notice, in his Warren Commission testimony. He also downplayed his interest in Lee. Why would such a brilliant man like that be interested in inviting Lee Oswald anywhere--unless they either had something in common, or Paine recognized Lee’s intelligence and insight? Yet this week Mike Paine had taken Lee to hear Gen. Walker’s speech, and just the night before, to an ACLU meeting. Lee and Mike had one thing in common: both men were not getting along with their wives, and worked in town all week, staying out of their lives except for the weekends. This arrangement for both men occurred, too, at about the same time, which i found peculiarly coincidental.

If you make a list of all the “coincidences” in the assassination literature, as i now call it, you’ll be amazed. There are too many such “coincidences” to be accounted for by mere chance. I was married to a man who specialized in statistics— he took a major in the subject---and I, myself, was trained to use statistics. And when you look at all the people who died connected with the Kennedy assassination, don’t bother with how they died— deaths can seem like heart attacks with sodium morphate, and a man can be injected with ether through the roof of his mouth and seem to die of natural causes. Just jot down the date of birth for each death, and the date of death. Then go to the expected lifespan tables, and jot down the differences one way or the other. That’s when you’ll come to realize that far too many of these people died before their time. One might say that lifestyle is also a factor, but if a random list is made of persons of similar occupations born the same age, and their death dates checked, you’ll see that it wasn’t healthy to have been involved.

Lee specifically told me, for the second or third time, that he did not trust Michael Paine, and that I should never have anything to do with the Paines — they were wild cards, he said.

What hugely interested me was Lee’s desire to step up Kennedy’s protection when he came to Dallas. Lee was not only in the circle of plotters, by now he’d offered top be one of the snipers. The way Lee told me this was in the most sparse of terms. He simply said, “I’m part of the rifle now.”

But his words chilled me. Of course we both knew he was being let in so that he could be set up. “At least,” he said, “nobody knows I was in Mexico City. I’ve got the photos to prove it.”

I did not know what this meant until 1999. I thought he had faked some photos to “prove” he was still in Texas when he was actually in Mexico City. I now believe that the photos of the “second Oswald” which were provided from the CIA’s station in Mexico City were assembled with Lee’s knowledge. When Lee was questioned by Dallas police after his capture, and his visit to Mexico City was brought up, I read that this was the only time Lee lost his composure. He respn there, of course. Nevertheless, to know that he had been so thoroughly betrayed--that his presence in Mexico City was allowed to be known, when it could all come back on everybody’s heads--even Dr. Ochsner’s— this had to be a shocker for Lee, and he must have known then how expendable he really was. Lee had told his interrogators at that time that he knew the soft and the hard methods of questioning, warning them that they would not be able to break him. We had

read together portions of a manual Dave Ferrie had floating around at his place, along with the MK/ULTRA materials, called KUBARK or CUBARC (sp?) Which described all sorts of interrogation methods. Lee said that he had been trained to deal with all of them. The only one that concerned him was the sensory deprivation method. Nobody had ever been through 24 hours of sensory deprivation, Lee said, without breaking. And prisoners who had been secretly subjected to this deprivation procedure would say almost anything rather than be subjected to it again. The entire body was fitted with a rubber suit, and all sounds were blocked off, except what came from the water in which the person was immersed up to the chin. Total darkness, and nothingness. Nobody could withstand it. Sparky had been present when we looked at these manuals--they had just come into Dave Ferrie's hands— and we spent a whole night discussing them, a discussion which evolved into matters of ethics, religion and philosophy.

Sparky was a very circular thinker, and had never had much education, but he wasn't stupid. He understood that the means existed to mentally and physically torture somebody so that nothing would show. This knowledge terrified him: he could imagine it happening to each of us for getting involved as we were. I'll never forget that he said he'd rather shoot any of us than see us go into a situation that might mean this kind of unseen and unknown torture. Certainly, he was ordered to kill Lee in the end. But if he had to convince himself that it was for the best, this is how he would have been able to do it: saving Lee from a fate worse than death by a mercy killing. Perhaps with the idea of mercy in his head, he thought of the excuse of giving Jackie Kennedy some "mercy" in not having to deal with a long trial of the so-called killer of her husband. It seems the press was glad to get his excuse, but the reason he thought it up at all is probably based on Sparky's excuses that he had to give himself for pulling the trigger: first, that he was ordered to do so, and secondly, that it would be saving Lee from torture. That's the way Sparky's mind went, up and down like an emotional yo-yo, in a circle.

Anyway, in this very important phone call, Lee had not only explained the 'right-wing' meeting, but he realized that if he could help urge on emotions, the demonstration planned the next night against Stevenson might display enough roughness that security measures for Kennedy's visits might consequently be stepped up.

There were rumbles, apparently, going around after Walker's speech (I got the impression Walker was not the only one speaking that night, though), that a demonstration was going to be held. Lee told me he made some remarks — especially in the matter of reminding the attendees that Stevenson— the Commie-soft "pinko"--- was going to be speaking in this very auditorium the next day. A number of people made up their minds, Lee said, to show up and denounce Stevenson for what he was.

"I read about it in the paper," I told him. "He was spit on. He was hit with some placards."

Lee in his conversations referred to JFK as "the Chief" -- and he might also have used JFK's code name, which I had forgotten, but have been told was 'Lancer'.

"Better Stevenson getting bops on the head, than the Chief getting bullets in the head," Lee told me. . "Stevenson wasn't in any real danger. I made sure of that."

I am reconstructing these words as close as I can to Lee's actual words.

If what Lee did sounds unethical, as a friend has brought up to me (Stevenson might have been hurt or killed) i can only say that if Lee said "he made sure" then I believe Stevenson, though assaulted by placards, was never in any actual danger of anything worse.

Surely, Lee emphasized, this would raise concern for the safety of the President.

Lee described his trip with Michael Paine to the ACLU differently than the way Michael Paine described it to the Warren Commission. Said Paine for the record: "...I took him in my car, he and I alone, and on the way...described the ACLU to him, and he didn't know about it, and described its purpose."

On the contrary, Lee knew his politics. He read the papers avidly--that's on record— and he was highly concerned about civil rights. Lee probably joined the ACLU — not to embarrass the organization, for he thought his membership would never become common knowledge, I'm sure— but because he wanted to add his voice to the common causes espoused by the ACLU regarding civil rights.

Of his trip with Michael Paine, Lee said they'd had "a debate. I played my usual part." In other words, Michael missed the real man: he got the Scarlet Pimpernel. Michael Paine said that on "the night Stevenson spoke in Dallas" he attended a meeting of the John Birch Society. He said he assumed Lee had gone to the Stevenson event because Lee had nodded his head when people brought up at the ACLU meeting how badly Stevenson had been treated. Lee did not tell me that he attended Stevenson's meeting, and I'm afraid I simply assumed he'd been there. Had we had more time to talk about it, I would have asked more questions, but there were many other things on our mind. Lee did not mention Paine's attendance at the John Birch Society meeting. What he did mention were meetings — several of them--- and he gave no details, except that he'd been there "with Sparky" once. Sparky at this time learned that the prisoner(s) had died only a month after being injected with the serum. The topic of health and hospitals had come up because Sparky's sister, Eva, had phlebitis (or a similar problem) with her leg, and he was afraid to have her go to the hospital with everything that was going on. People were flying in and out of Dallas, he said, and everything was in a constant state of flux. The word was that the assassination would definitely take place in Dallas. Lee used code words for "assassination" and even for "Dallas." We'd worked out our emergency vocabulary quite a while earlier.

It would not happen in Austin area-- too close to LBJ-- only Dallas had the reputation (well-deserved at the time) that could allow almost any story to get concocted. Of particular note was Lee's remarks that Carlos Marcello wanted to make sure his deportation trial (fueled by a personal vendetta run by Bobby Kennedy to kick Marcello out of the country for good) was going to end in New Orleans in his favor ---the very day Kennedy visited Dallas. "Just to show how much power he really has," Lee told me, "he is going to time it to coincide with----" Lee broke off, but of course I understood.

"He has that much power," I said, almost whispering into the phone.

"He wants to rub Bobby's nose in it."

Meaning, Marcello would deal a double dose of venom: if he could manage it, Marcello would time the very hour of his victory over Bobby Kennedy with Jack Kennedy's assassination.

As a matter of fact, that's just what Marcello did. He was acquitted, almost at the very moment Kennedy actually died at Parkland Hospital.. He was having a massive victory celebration by the time Kennedy's death was finally announced— an announcement that wasn't made until LBJ left the hospital on his way to the presidential airplane..

Despite all our forebodings, Lee never hung up without saying something hopeful, something cheerful. "Don't worry," he'd say, even if somebody was sawing off his leg.

Before he hung up, Lee said he was going to try to call three times the following week, to make up for having missed once. And he did.

On his call on the 30th of October, I remember Lee reminding me that his “anniversary” was approaching--when he had “defected” to Russia. He also mentioned that he had now been “mad with love” for me for six months.

“OH!” I answered, “and I am mad with love for you, too, mashwah--for six DAYS now!”

“Listen to you!” he chided me, laughing. “How am I to concentrate? You’re always on my mind.”

“My darling Lee,” I replied, “My sweetheart. I can’t concentrate, either. I was thinking about you at the lab, rolling a handful of liquid mercury around in the palm of my hand---”

“My God!” Lee said, alarmed. Mercury is highly poisonous.

“Well, this huge thermometer broke, and we were scooping it up, trying to stop it from going down the drain --- and it was so shiny and pretty--- and suddenly, I was thinking of you, and just rolling this stuff around in my hand--”

I told him how it seemed the whole world was poisoned by what we knew. And our power to scoop the poison out, to save life, seemed so limited.

“I still have some ideas,” Lee said. “Dave (Ferrie) and Sparky— you know they are doing everything they can think of----and there are others. We’ll be hiding our tracks, mixing up trails. We’ll save him (JFK), and if we fail, you know I’ve got my friends.”

“I know that.”

“So---I’ll be seeing you again. Sooner than you know,” he told me. “And when I do,” Lee said, “you’ll know where my heart is, because I won’t be wearing my wedding band.”

I guess it took me a whole month to finally be able to write down that last sentence. I did not want to face the picture of Lee in my memory, as I saw him on television, showing his manacles to the reporters, when they asked about his handcuffs ---his arms lifted up, so you could see that he was wearing his favorite jewelry---his silvery ID bracelet and his Marine ring— but he was not wearing that wedding band.

Later on, I saw --in the glimpses that I had of him in the news---that his ID bracelet and his Marine ring had both been taken away from him, along with his shirt, so that he was wearing only a torn, stained tee-shirt for a long time, and standing in line-ups, I learned much later— with men dressed in suits and with nice shirts on. *Guess which of these fine men, here, madam or sir, is the bad guy?* It was the Land of the Free: Lee asked for a shirt. No. He asked to take a shower. He never got one.

It was also the Home of the Brave.

As the time drew closer to November 22, I was becoming so anxious that I could scarcely sleep or eat. David Ferrie called and promised me that he would do everything in his power to save Lee from becoming the scapegoat, and that he had worked out some elaborate plans. I already knew about Hull Field, of course, and once again, I had packed my suitcase. On November 22nd, I would take an emergency bag of items with me, just in case. I had enough cash set aside to get a bus to take me to Fort Walton beach. There was nothing else to do but just do

my work--including the last items I knew Dave had to have (the cancer serum was being kept alive and was still slated for use against Castro, he told me). A second use for the serum was its utility in inducing lung cancer so rapidly in mice that experiments in trying to deal with this virulent cancer strain could proceed more rapidly than with other lung cancer experiments in mice.

Lee called me early in November, but I don't remember anything else about that call.. Around the 7th of November, Lee called again, to tell me that Sparky's sister was in the hospital. At this time, Lee mentioned for the first time that he was penetrating a gun-running ring that Sparky had leaked information about to him because he'd been so distracted by his sister's hospitalization. Sparky, unable to handle all the complications, asked Lee to help him out. Sparky was in a situation where he liked to make money for the mob running guns and drugs, but he also was now anxious to protect himself because of the upcoming shakedown of the mob, should their part in the assassination come to light. He was anxious to present a good face to the FBI, with whom he'd had dealings in the past as an informant (whenever it suited him to blackmail or punish somebody who hadn't been cooperative for some reason, Sparky had been known to run to the FBI or to have clued in some nice payoff to a Dallas policeman, so that a number of them saw Sparky as their very good friend). In this case, Sparky, distracted with Eva's illness, and feeling guilty because he'd recently slapped her around (Sparky was no angel, that's for sure), wanted to visit her constantly. So Lee, seeing this as an opportunity to get it on the record that he was an infiltrator, was now ready to tip off the FBI concerning some smuggled guns that would be coming in from the north.

I never knew more than that, but Lee's attempt to prove he was, as he put it. "A good guy" remained in my memories, and when the Elrod story came to light, I immediately recognized that this must have been the gun-running infiltration stint where Lee informed the FBI. For an elaboration about the Elrod story, please see Appendix _____ X. It was because of Eva Grant's illness, then, that Sparky involved Lee in the matter, which resulted in a Dallas policeman stopping a car whose headlight or tail-light (I no longer remember) had been deliberately put out in some way so that the police would be sure to take notice of the car. There was a high speed chase, and a crash— and the guns were discovered.

In the middle of November, Lee began to teach me about the politics behind the assassination. It was extremely complex. He urged me to remember certain names, such as Bobby Baker (easy) and Billy Sol Estes (not so easy). He had not been able to call me on Veterans Day, so this call had to be later. He wasn't getting along with Marina at all: he'd had his job a month by now, and although he had the money to get an apartment for them---in fact, he had enough saved for three months' rent from legitimate sources (Lee never used his CIA for FBI money for private matters)--of course he did not rent an apartment for him and her and their babies. He wouldn't be in Dallas more than another week, if all went well. He'd do his part to save JFK and get the hell out of there.

Marina would receive this saved money (about \$150 plus whatever else Lee could give her) so she'd have enough to live on until George DeMohrenschildt's attorney could "out of pity" funnel her some more. George said he would watch over Marina, in return for use of the interest on the fund. Lee thought he was leaving his wife in good hands, and he always had hopes that, eventually, we'd be able to show up again after a few years, and possibly even adopt Lee's children if Marina didn't want their burden. I was all for it: even when married to Robert, who

did not want to adopt children, I saw Robert's heart grow tender and generous toward some of the children we brought into our home to nurture during tough times in these children's lives. Two of them--Susan Doom and Judy DeVries--have a very special place in my memories.

So Lee and I were very much the same--wanting lots of children, would adopt additional if we could, would have lots of pets (dogs, cats, and yes, if we could, horses!).

We built our castles in the sky because we were young, and we wanted to believe that Dave Ferrie (so brilliant!) and Lee's trusted contacts (so powerful!) would be clever enough to get him out alive, even as the rogue military, CIA and Texas-centered powers continued to weave a web around him. The false trails and fake evidence and altered records that Lee and I had wanted to proliferate so that we could go away and hide and not be traced turned into a wholesale purging of Lee's real identity, until there were two or three of him, at any given time, it seemed — and by now, these doppelgangers were doing things that would paint Lee in the worst of lights. Lee himself knew that Richard Nagell, one of his doppelgangers, had purposely gotten himself arrested for fear of being set up as a patsy. Nagell carried Lee's Hidell name -- a name used by more than one person I had heard about---and other incriminating ID. Nagell let it be known that he refused to become a designated patsy. He may have thought Lee was the real thing, Lee told me— that perhaps Castro had commissioned Lee to kill the President. Having heard of some of the escape plans that Lee was trying to form in an attempt, of course, to get out of Dallas after he had done all he could (and not to kill, but to save, though Nagell didn't know that), Richard Case Nagell, fearing he'd be set up in Lee's place, may have deliberately got himself arrested and out of the action.

I have to add that if I had not known this name beforehand, Lee would not have spontaneously brought it up. But I had seen a name written on a check-out form, for taking out untraceable guns, in the Newman Building where Guy Banister's office was located, and the name "Nagy" or "Nagell" was scribbled there. Lee at that time said the name was probably "Nagell"--or maybe Dave Ferrie told me, I no longer recall. But the name stuck with me because "Nagy" is a Hungarian name associated with royalty, and I, being one quarter Hungarian, remembered that little detail and was curious about who the person might be.

Lee knew he was being set up all the way, but he played dumb.

That's how he stayed in the center of the assassination circle, although, as he told me, not one of the final players in the scenario were supposed to know who anyone outside their particular group was— and there were, Lee told me "three" separate groups who would not be able to recognize each other. Even the members of the three groups would not be known to each other, Lee said, until the 20th. That would be the last time, Lee said, that he would call me. I must make ready, and at four o'clock, take a bus to Fort Walton Beach. On the night of the 21st, I'd make sure that I had a tiff with Robert.

I felt a little sad at doing this to Bob: he had been extraordinarily kind to me lately because I'd been so disappointed at not being allowed to go to school. But as usual, I saw amazingly little of him between his school and my work at PenChem. It would not be that hard for me to break away.

=====the next section will deal with the last two telephone calls=====thanks.j

I learned this information on the 18th of November.