

Before the Silence Came: Lee's Last Telephone Calls

Last section

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note slight change in first sentence here, and a little further down, please add where there are caps!

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 PROBABLY “three” separate groups who would not be able to recognize each other. Even the members of the three groups would PROBABLY not be known to each other, Lee said, until the 20th. That would be the last time,(REMOVE: lee said,) that he would call me. ON THE 22ND I must make ready, and WHEN I HEARD FROM DAVE FERRIE IN HOUSTON ON THE 23RD, ABOUT NOON, I SHOULD PLAN TO take a bus to Fort Walton Beach ON MONDAY MORNING AFTER ROBERT WENT TO SCHOOL. I WOULD DRAW OUT THE \$400 BEFORE LEAVING. On the NIGHT OF THE 24TH, 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

Last Phone Call, November 20th, 1963

“It's me again,” he said.

“Oh, Lee!”

I couldn't act the part I wanted to play of the light-hearted and encouraging lover. We were both very down. A weight had settled upon us. I very well knew i might never hear his voice directed to me again, nor would he hear my words of love. I felt like I was choking. It was a cool afternoon, and he had called me back right away. It was either this date, or on the 18th, that I had to call Lee, because he missed the call to me i had expected on the 19th, and Dave had called to tell me that Lee had to set up a new call schedule for me: it was getting very close to impossible for him to call me again.

I was able to place a person-to-person call through the operator, but Dave's operator was not yet in place, and the lady who took the call made me tell her Lee's exact name, or she would not put through the call. I was quite spoiled with our special operator, and angry that this operator had taken the call, but there was no help for it: I had already asked to be put through to the Texas State Book depository, to cue in Lee that I could take his call whenever he was ready, and this lady demanded his name before she would put the call through. Okay, I thought to myself, this is

not our operator, so i will be very brief, in case she listens in! I certainly would not wait for Lee to answer the phone, as I had originally planned. . At least he knew that I had been reached by Dave. After a minute, and some trouble as it seemed to me, a lady answered the phone, and I used my most official-sounding adult voice, clearly and slowly asking her if Lee Oswald worked there. It seemed to me that she was not sure, and then I told her that he was a janitor. "Janitor" was the code word that meant "J.A." (My first two initials) was calling. We felt that lee could possibly be described as a janitor without anybody catching on, if I had to contact him. I asked the lady to pass the message on to the "janitor" that somebody had called for him, and hung up.

The exchange at Covington must have been put into order again pretty quickly, or else Lee took a chance, because I waited less than an hour at PenChem's phone (I often worked overtime, and Robert would only pick me up when i called him, so I had time to wait for this call). My paycheck stubs from this time period show i was working an extra hour a day--mostly because i was working on Dave's chemical projects — and also because I could get phone calls with nobody around at the payphone there, if Lee said not to use the payphone station set-up.

Because time was so short now, Lee told me there wouldn't be another call from him unless he reached Laredo.

"Lee," I said slowly, "you didn't say until. You said "unless.""

"I apologize," he answered. I heard him suck up his breath. We were both very close to tears. Outside, it was sunset.

"You'll go to Cancun," Lee said. "You'll stay in a fine hotel. I'll be there — if they---"

We were both speechless.

"You know," he said then, "if I don't make it out— you have to go on with everything."

"Oh, sure!" i said, bitterly. I told him that I would never allow anyone to replace him in my heart.

"But promise me," he said. "That you'll have babies."

"I don't want to have babies with anyone but you."

"Oh yes you will," he answered. "You take home baby birds and feed them. So you have to have babies. So promise me."

I promised.

Four and a half years after Lee's death, the first baby, conceived with Robert, was born. I named her Susan, calling her "Susie" in honor of Susie Hanover. Susie's middle name "Mavinee" satisfied me because it rhymed with Lee and had two ee's.. Robert insisted on naming the three boys we next had. Our fifth and last child, Sarah Marie, was a girl, so I was finally allowed to name another baby.. This child once again carried a middle name that rhymed with "Lee," --and in fact, I wanted to name her "Sarah Lee," but Bob objected, saying it would sound too much like a food product. Even so, in school, Sarah's Marie's high school friends called her "Sarah Lee," which of course pleased me very much.

I never spoke another word of Russian after November 20, 1963. I could not bear to do so. Only because I had a few Russian books in our house, which the children noticed, did they have any idea of my long-faded ability to converse in Russian. I still have a set of Latin cards that Lee and I studied, trying to impress Dave Ferrie with. I'd studied Latin from the seventh through eleventh grades, and knew most of the Mass in Latin as well. Lee liked to use flash cards to help him memorize Spanish, so we obtained the Latin flash cards as well.

"How much can you say?" I asked him, because of course i wanted to know what he was up

against.

“I’ll be meeting tonight,” he said. “Two different places. Then I’ll go to bed and miss you.”

“And tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow, I’ll go say goodbye to Junie and Rachel and Marina....”

Lee took a gasp of air, as if he couldn’t breathe. Tears had started streaming down my cheeks

“Oh God, Lee!”

I could hear him crying. We were in the very depths of hell. I couldn’t see, I couldn’t even stand. I leaned against the phone and cried, too.

“Just go!” I urged him. “Get out— it’s too late to help him.”

“Even if I wanted to, which I do not,” Lee said, his voice trembling, “I couldn’t. Not only me--they’d come after my family. They’d find you. You’d all die---”

What could i say? I knew it was true.

“You just remember ---,” Lee said, “David Atlee Phillips.”

“I won’t forget.”

“I’m going to get out alive,” Lee said, trying to choke back his emotions. “You’ll see---”

“Sure.”

“Juduffki--Minnie Mouse---” he said, and that was enough to get me almost into hysteria. He was calling me those pet names of his, and I couldn’t take it.

“Just tell them you’re ill. Swallow a bunch of laxatives----”

Lee probably made a bitter, harsh laugh, I don’t know.

“They’d just get another gun in there to take the place of mine,” he told me. “If I stay, that will be one less bullet aimed at Kennedy.”

As this sank in, he added, “Maybe i can still do something. They’re going to pin it on me anyway.”

“I hate the human race,” I told him.

“Stop it,” he said, almost commandingly. “I can still do something. I might be able to fire a warning shot. That’s what I intend to do.”

I was speechless with hope.

“The Secret Service will react,” Lee said. “The Chief might react. Even the driver---”

“Even the driver?” I repeated.

Lee told me that the driver’s habits had been studied, and a shot going off would cause him to brake, which would slow the vehicle down. This was desired because even this cabal feared Aristotle Onassis, who would send killers out to track down anyone who killed Jackie Kennedy, or so the rumor went--and besides, everybody liked Jackie and orders were out not to hit her. It was to spare Jackie that some very expert marksmen missed or delayed their shots that day in Dealey Plaza: she was in their line of sight a great deal of the time, according to David Ferrie, who got the report from Marcello’s henchmen as soon as he arrived in the Houston area.

But that’s another story. I would receive a call from a Dave Ferrie who was in tears, totally broken down over what had happened to Lee. The call came while I was still at PenChem, and still reeling from the horror of the assassination and the news that Lee had been captured.

Dave asked me if I had the medical library pass card that had his name on it, and which had been issued through the Ochsner system. I said that i did, and that’s when Dave told me that somebody told him his library card had been found on Lee when he was arrested. While Dave knew this was impossible--Lee had returned the library card---nevertheless, before he took off for Houston in what was a driving rain, he had gone even to Lee’s apartment, despite the presence of

police and of snitches, to see if the landlady had seen 'a library card' because he remembered that one was still out there, missing.

Indeed it was. I had forgotten to give Lee the library card before leaving for Ganesville, and the medical library card was still in my possession. In fact, it was in my purse. I had expected that somebody would call me if Lee had been arrested--Dave had promised me he would do so as soon as he could, so I would know what to do, if plans changed. That meant, of course, that he might not call. But he had. I destroyed the card.

I think David Ferrie would have had a heart attack if I hadn't reassured him half a dozen times that the card was in little pieces. In typical Ferrie fashion, he asked me to dissolve the pieces in semi-concentrated sulphuric acid. I told him that I would, but I didn't want to go back into the lab. Instead, I buried the bits of the card under pine needle debris, since I was near some pine trees.

Dave told me that he still had a chance to get Lee out, and that he had only been connected so far with Officer Tippit's death, which he believed was a total set-up. Tippit and Sparky, he said, were friends, and it was Tippit who was supposed to drive Lee to Red Bird airport. Unless Tippit turned out to be a traitor. Another police officer, whose name was POSSIBLY Roscoe White (AS I HAVE TOLD OTHERS, AND ALSO, MOST RECENTLY, DEBRA CONWAY, I WAS NOT TOLD THIS NAME, ONLY THAT IT WAS AN OFFICER WHO WOULD INTERCEPT LEE'S FILM AND MINOX CAMERA, TO PROTECT THEM FROM DESTRUCTION--LEE'S EVIDENCE OF HIS ACTUAL ACTIVITIES. BECAUSE I RECALL THE NAME "ROCKY" I THOUGHT THIS MIGHT BE ROSCOE WHITE, BUT IT'S ONLY A GUESS. AT ANY RATE, SOMEONE, WHO WOULD TRY TO INTERCEPT THE FILM AND CAMERA, had been brought specially in.

. The minutiae about the Minox and its film records are too detailed to go into here, but Lee had arranged with some officer to intercept the film before it reached the wrong hands, and to make sure that it would be kept in a safe place so that its contents, which may have included photos of the notes he wrote to the FBI, could be used to prove his innocence, should he be captured.

The Minox camera proved to be a very difficult problem for the FBI. Lee, supposedly a poor man, had possession of a camera that was very high-tech, equivalent to a poor man's owning a high-class professional camcorder today. It just didn't fit the pattern. But of course, Lee's disappearing ink chemicals, his pedometer, HIS SPYGLASS (INCORRECTLY DESCRIBED AS A TELESCOPE) and a lot of other things didn't really fit that profile, either.

They certainly were clueless about LEE'S technical training in so many areas, and all the trade craft that he knew.

When Lee said goodbye to me that day, he told me that he would be wearing the brown shirt that I had bought for him. This shirt was identical to one that Marina knew about, except it was newer. I'd purchased it for Lee when he impulsively said that the shirt, which was on sale, was just like his own, which had been damaged. Lee told me that he would be wearing 'the brown shirt' when he came to me. Imagine how I feel, seeing that shirt on him, in those pictures. The shock was even greater because I had avoided--for over thirty-five years--looking at anything to do with the matter. I kept nothing about the assassination--not even the smallest newspaper article. Nothing.

Even though I've kept souvenirs of all the other big events in American history since then, as my children well know, I never had a scrap about Kennedy, the assassination, or Lee. There is a

hole in the newspaper collection.

Indeed, when the kids brought home the movie JFK to see, i did not see it with them. I couldn't bear it, and i was afraid i'd give way to my emotions.

Only in 1998, on the 35th anniversary of the event, did i finally watch the movie, which had a lot of errors, of course. Still, I was much moved by the challenge Oliver Stone made. He said that to remain silent was to be a coward.

That hit home.

When Lee said goodbye to me, it was the last time i ever heard his voice,

But I would never forget that I promised to tell his story, so that his children would not have to live in shame, and so that justice might be done. I have done what i could: I pray God bless it for good.

Judyth Vary Baker (who kept the name "Baker" even after her divorce, to stay hidden, and who originally planned to die, and let this story be told from the grave--but that would have been the cowardly thing to do.).