

New York: Hunting The Big One (1977)

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The Big One

BY MID-1977, I WAS BEGINNING TO EASE OFF DAILY REPORTING. I had developed a knack for rewrite and preferred nightside hours. The night city editor, Steve Matthews, broke me in on the night desk getting experience doing the duties associated with the post of assistant city editor, which I did not yet have. This involved working with editors from the news and copy desks, making judgments about stories and reporters, working with the production staff, and, most important, nurturing reporters as they worked their assignments. In this role, I earned a niche working with Matthews; eventually after the strike I would be promoted to assistant city editor and night city editor on weekends. I had stepped onto the first rung on the ladder of news management.

Though my job had shifted, I remained preoccupied with the mid-town crime story. I kept tabs on developments in the Ianniello investigation and maintained my contacts in the police department. Ordinary crime stories weren't enough anymore; I had become the kind of news bug compelled to fly ever closer to the flame to get at the truth. Murder stories? Been there, done that. What lured me was the Big One. And the biggest story of them all at that time was the murder of President Kennedy.

While I was at the Daily News the world of popular political affairs was a newsman's paradise. The drive to reveal secrets gained energy in the compost of Vietnam and Watergate. But it had come to life in 1963 in the aftermath of Kennedy's murder. Few in the news business could accept the official explanation for what happened. The murders of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy five years later fueled this distrust. The losses of Vietnam and lies of Watergate created an insatiable need in the press and the questioning public to purge government of all lies and all liars. All secrets became fair game.

Just a few years before, in 1974 and 1975, the most sensational secrets were those exposed in Senate hearings in a push to clean house at the CIA. Leading the push was Sen. Frank Church, an Idaho Democrat whose Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities revealed secrets so dark—contract murder, sexual scandal, a secret government agreement with the Mafia—that it would take years of light before American popular culture fully understood their enormity.

The lethal potential of these secrets hit home on June 19, 1975,

when Sam “Momo” Giancana, boss of the Chicago Capone crime family, was shot seven times in the head in the basement den of his Oak Park, Illinois, home the day before he was scheduled to talk with Church committee staff.

Days later, Johnny Roselli, the Capones’ dapper capo in Los Angeles, did talk with the committee. Then, three months later, Roselli was murdered, just days after a Miami dinner with Florida mob boss Santos Trafficante Jr., aboard a yacht belonging to a Trafficante associate. Roselli’s body, chopped into pieces, was found a year later in a 55-gallon oil drum weighed down with heavy chains in Dumfoundling Bay near Miami.

The night he was found, I was just starting my nightside job, and I reworked details on the story on the rewrite bank for the late editions. It was just my first taste of what was to come, but it started me on the road that would lead to this account.

Over the course of the Church investigation, the circumstances of these two murders, combined with the revelations coming from the muck being raked by the committee, were literally incredible. They told of a pact between the Mafia and the CIA, a conspiracy so sordid that it seemed obvious the entire government had been compromised by the mob for years. The stench of corruption—later documented, catalogued and released by the Senate Select Intelligence Committee in a 347-page report—caused Congress to probe deeper, authorizing the House Select Committee on Assassinations in September 1976.

Organizational problems and politics stalled the House committee’s investigation until March 1977, when Rep. Louis Stokes (D-Ohio) was named chairman and G. Robert Blakey, a law professor and expert on organized crime, was made chief counsel. By law, the committee had until January 1979 to work.

Throughout this time, I was reporting on the midtown rackets for the News, developing my contacts with organized crime investigators and looking for the Big One.

My duties at night on the rewrite bank and as a news editor allowed me to learn the craft of rewrite by weaving together wire service accounts and reporting done by the News’ Washington staff, touched

up with some follow-up in New York. The pervasive sense of conspiracy and betrayal created by these stories provided a backdrop for the revelations I continued to find about the smut rackets in midtown.

The Daily News was the perfect incubator for an investigator. Reporters for a tab like that were assumed to be de facto experts on organized crime, and I did my homework to puzzle out gangster culture in New York City. Having been part of the courthouse crew in Queens, where neighborhood and ethnic alliances prevailed, got me off to a good start.

Working on cityside, I learned more about gangland news and became friends and colleagues with the people behind the News bylines I'd admired. The basic routine for nightside on every story assignment was to check the clips to see what had been written before about any of the people involved. In slow periods between assignments, I'd pore over the old stories of News veterans. I learned the origins of the gangsters I was expected to write about and to know so well, the exquisite details of who was who, what they did and why. I spent hours going over the clips in the News library, reading books about organized crime. As the revelations about the investigations in Washington grew, I found troubling and recurring themes in these old news accounts from New York.

I came to focus on the generation of gangsters that emerged when the Mafia commission was reorganized in the late 1930s under "Lucky" Luciano, who took over the largest and strongest Masseria crime family, with the help of fellow gangsters Vito Genovese and Frank Costello. Costello and Luciano grew to be two of the most powerful of their time, in part because they were trusted by Irish and Jewish thugs who were not admitted into the Mafia because of their ancestry. They also had developed a knack for working with the government, helping establish a pattern that would plague the nation. In fact, these killers turned out to be players in the drama that climaxed with the murder of the president of the United States, and whose doings had been chronicled in the News for years.

Costello, the youngest of six children, was born in 1891 to farming parents in Lauropoli near the Ionian Sea. His name was Francesco Castiglia. When he was 4, his family moved to America, settling on East 108th Street, where the family lived over a grocery store. He quit

school after 5th grade and became a street hood, doing time for gun possession. Within a few years, Castiglia changed his name to Frank Costello, an Irish version of his name. In no time, he fell under the wing of Arnold Rothstein, the Jewish financial wizard who made a fortune for a generation of Italian, Jewish and Irish gangsters in New York during Prohibition and who, in effect, became the architect of organized crime in America.

Tutored and financed by Rothstein, Costello set up his bootlegging business at 405 Lexington Ave. Though he later cultivated an image as a cultured and friendly businessman, as comfortable with respectable businessmen as with men of humble origins like his own, Costello was as vicious as any other rum-running thief. During the 1920s, when he kept a bootleg liquor depot on Long Island, there were constant rumors that he and Joseph P. Kennedy, the father of JFK, smuggled booze to Boston.

Luciano, though he outranked Costello in the Masseria organization, was also a disciple of Rothstein. Born near Palermo in 1897, the third of five children, Luciano moved to America at a young age and grew up on the lower East Side near 10th Street and 1st Avenue. By age 14 he had quit school. He begun running with gangsters and smoking opium in Chinatown. His first arrest was for heroin possession. During Prohibition he was pinched for bootlegging, gun possession, assault, armed robbery, grand larceny and gambling. But he was never convicted, hence his nickname. When he was charged with heroin sales in 1923, Luciano gave evidence on his non-Sicilian competitors, and the charges against him were dropped. By time of the 1931 sit-down in Wappingers Falls, his luck and past liaison with Arnold Rothstein, made him second in command to Joe the Boss Masseria, whom he would eventually conspire to murder, too.

A skilled organizer, Luciano not only worked with Rothstein, but also allied himself with other Jewish mobsters—Meyer Lansky, Dutch Schultz and Louis “Lepke” Buchalter. Nearly half of the 1.6 million Jews in the United States lived in New York City, where the Jewish bootleggers made their base. Before his murder in 1928, Rothstein was the brains of this group, dealing cash and advice not only to Costello and Luciano but also to Lansky and his group. Lansky, born in 1902 in Poland, came to the Lower East Side as a boy. He left school by the 8th

grade and would team up with Bugsy Seigel, another street thug who was four years younger. Together, with Rothstein, they would run liquor.

Another of Rothstein's disciples was a Jew who grew up in Bronx named Arthur Flegenheimer, who took the name Dutch Schultz, and who worked as a gunman for Legs Diamond during the 1920s. By 1931, Schultz had a network of more than 17 garages and beer drops in the Bronx and was among the city's most feared and respected bootleggers. He forged alliances with Luciano, Costello and other Mafiosi and paid tribute when dealing in their areas. But in time he would get too big for his britches.

In November 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected president. The following February, Congress approved the 21st Amendment, repealing Prohibition. By December 1933 enough states had agreed to the amendment that Prohibition was scheduled to end Jan. 1, 1935. Now it was time for players in the underworld to scramble for control of the legitimate liquor market. The pressure was intense.

Adding to the heat, a young special prosecutor from Manhattan named Thomas E. Dewey was making headlines and headway in his crime-busting career. Schultz, under gang pressure because of the end of Prohibition and a target of Dewey's gumshoes, let it be known that he was going to have Dewey murdered.

Luciano and the other members of the Mafia commission knew they could not stand the backlash such a murder would bring. They immediately put out a contract on Schultz, hiring a Brooklyn crew led by Louis "Lepke" Buchalter and associated with Albert Anastasia and the Vincent Mangano family. Called Murder Inc. by the newspapers and cops, Buchalter's gang was made up of some Italian thugs from the Ocean Hill area of Brooklyn and some Jewish hoods who hung out at a pool hall and candy store at Livonia and Saratoga streets, under the tracks of the elevated. These toughs did muscle work for the Mangano family, working the protection racket and pulling in up to \$10 million a year from extortions, collections and enforcement in businesses ranging from bakeries to garment and leather workers, film projectionists to taxi services, shoemakers to poultry workers.

Murder Inc. tracked Schultz down and shot him on Oct. 23, 1934, while he was in the men's room at the Palace Chop House in Newark. Luciano, despite having acted to spare Dewey's life, was himself a

target of the lawman and charged with a range of crimes. He ended up being convicted on a prostitution charge and was sentenced July 17, 1936, to between 30 and 50 years in Dannemora prison in upstate New York. Buchalter himself went underground to escape a murder charge brought by Dewey. He later was persuaded to surrender, only to be found guilty and sentenced to die, which he did in the electric chair in 1944.

After Luciano went to Dannemora, Costello took control as acting boss of the Luciano family. Gradually the friction among Mafia bosses shifted to narcotics, a perfect way to make up the profits lost with the end of bootleg liquor rackets.

The heroin trade shifted into high gear after Luciano was deported to Italy in 1946. In an ironic twist, he was allowed to return to his homeland because of his help with the war effort. William Donovan, chief of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II, had approached Luciano in prison in 1942 for help with the dockworkers. A deal was struck whereby the government would give him leniency if he used his criminal connections in New York to ensure labor peace on the waterfront. When he agreed, Luciano was moved to better prison quarters in Albany, where he remained until his parole in 1945. It was there that he revitalized the narcotics smuggling network.

This alliance between the mob and the OSS, the predecessor to the Central Intelligence Agency, was kept secret for years and, when disclosed, was often forgiven in the romantic storytelling about how the New Yorkers—gangsters included—hated America’s enemies. Such a view may have blinded the OSS’s successors to the dangers of alliances with evil.

Luciano’s ally, Vito Genovese, spent the war in Italy, having fled Brooklyn in the late 1930s after being indicted for murder. In Italy, Genovese worked for Mussolini’s fascists and even helped orchestrate the 1943 murder in New York of Carlos Tresca, the anti-fascist editor of the newspaper *The Hammer*. The triggerman was a 33-year-old thug named Carmine Galante, who himself would become *capo di tutti capi* in 1976, three years before his murder.

Genovese, eager to ingratiate himself with whoever was in power, worked for U.S. Army intelligence after Mussolini’s fall—until an

Army prosecutor learned of his criminal past. Extradition back to the United States was underway when witnesses against him in the original murder charge were poisoned or lost their memories. By 1948 he had returned to Brooklyn, where he and his former ally Costello began a struggle for power.

Costello—despite the past drug running of his old boss, Luciano—declared in 1948 that narcotics were off-limits to the Luciano family. Other families agreed; La Cosa Nostra simply couldn't stand the investigative pressure that narcotics would bring. Such duplicity was rampant. The Chicago mob actually paid their made members not to push dope. Some mobsters said they were opposed to narcotics, while they secretly engineered deals for their own benefit and turned their heads when soldiers pushed drugs. Other families, such as the Bonannos and Luccheses, simply ignored Costello. Genovese, though he had worked with Luciano to set up the smuggling links, said he supported Costello and otherwise kept his own counsel.

But Costello had troubles. He was distracted by investigations into his taxes. In addition, Willie “Moore” Moretti, his East Harlem boyhood pal and longtime Luciano associate, had started to behave erratically. In October 1951, Genovese, eager to chip away at Costello's network, ordered Moretti killed. Costello knew who was behind the murder of his boyhood friend but kept quiet. A Mafia commission sit-down in 1956 fell apart amid disagreement on the narcotics problem. And Costello kept the ban on narcotics. Finally, after dinner out on the evening of May 2, 1957, Costello arrived at his Central Park West apartment house to be greeted with “Hey, Frank, this is for you” from across the lobby.

Costello was shot in the face and gravely wounded, but he was not killed. He recovered. The entire underworld of New York was poised for his reaction. The ranks of all five families in New York, and their assorted mob allies in cities across the country, began to choose sides. First Willie Moore's murder, and now this! Were you with Frank or Vito? What would Frank do? Everything depended on what Costello did. Which was: nothing. Costello met with Genovese over lunch weeks later and said he wanted to retire. At once, the lives of an untold number of murderers, thieves, cutthroats and dope pushers were spared. There would be no gang war in the Mafia this time. Then

began a series of moves on other perceived threats.

Genovese turned to the only other possible menace within the Mafia—Albert Anastasia, boss of the Mangano family. On Oct. 25, 1957, five months after the attempted murder of Costello, Anastasia was shot while under barber-shave towels in the basement shop of the Park Sheraton Hotel in Manhattan. The photos of the bloody aftermath were Page 1 on the Daily News and became a visual icon for mob mayhem.

With Anastasia dead, Genovese wanted to cement his gains. He put out a call for the leaders of the families and their lieutenants to have a commission sit-down. The first order of business would be for the commission to recognize him as the boss of the Luciano family. The next issue was to deal with the problems created by the U.S. Bureau of Narcotics and its crackdown on dope peddling. Despite the profits to be had from narcotics, the pressure from law enforcement was so intense several Mafiosi agreed with Costello and wanted a ban on dope pushing with a death penalty for violations.

Not everyone was eager to go along with Genovese, however. After all, he had ordered the hit on Costello without the commission's approval. And though Carlo Gambino of the old Mangano family may not have resisted the Anastasia hit, some others felt Genovese had gone too far. Genovese was ready for their arguments; he could prove that Costello and Anastasia had plotted to kill him. Either way, he said all this should be thrashed out at the commission meeting to maintain peace.

Originally set for Chicago, the sit-down instead was held in upstate New York; at the suggestion of Buffalo boss Stafano Maggaddino. The location was a remote compound in the town of Apalachin, the New York home of one of Maggaddino's lieutenants, Joseph Barbara. On Nov. 14, 1957, more than 100 mob leaders representing nearly every crime family from all over the country began converging, in limo after limo, on the roads of that small country town.

New York State Trooper Sgt. Edgar D. Crosswell, knowing nothing in advance about the big get-together, saw this train of fancy black cars and became suspicious. He tracked them to Barbara's home, then set up a roadblock to inspect these sinister visitors and had troopers surround the compound. Inside the retreat, the meeting was just get-

ting underway when a lookout came in and reported that police were outside and that the house was surrounded. Suddenly, to their everlasting embarrassment, hardened Mafiosi, the cream of the nation's crime families, panicked and scattered. Some ran, in their city clothing, into the snowy woods surrounding the compound. Others drove their limos right into the hands of the State Police and later onto the pages of the Daily News.

Of the estimated 100 who had come to attend the sit-down, more than 60 were arrested and held for questioning. Among them were Santos Trafficante Jr. of Florida, Sam Giancana of Chicago, Joseph Civello of Dallas and Joseph Marcello of New Orleans, about whom I would learn much more later and who figured into my pursuit of the Big One.

Who can know what drove the readers' insatiable interest in these stories about the mob? Some armchair headshrinkers might speculate that Daily News readers found the crime figures something more than thugs and killers; maybe a few even saw ties to Robin Hood. But if deep down there was a silent admiration for the gangsters' independence and daring, there was also the conscious knowledge that they would come to a deservedly bad end.

The veteran mob reporters were legends to News guys: bylines such as Jerry Rose, Paul Meskill, Eddie Kirkman and Bill Federici. In slow periods between assignments, I'd pore over their old stories, learning gangland ins and outs and how to parse the grammar of mob life. Before I came to the Daily News, what I knew of the Mafia came from the old tabloids and Hollywood. Like everyone else, I had the black-and-white pictures in my head of Humphrey Bogart, James Cagney, Edgar G. Robinson, George Raft and the tough-guy argot used by the scriptwriters of decades past. Now the reality was right in front of me, and a vast history at my fingertips, thanks to the legendary mob reporters with whom I was now working regularly.

Rose, a counterpart to my first boss, Queens editor John Baird, was the editor of the Brooklyn section. Still robust in his sixties, Jerry walked in a kind of shuffle because of fallen arches. But he remained a thick, muscular man, and his stoop seemed to be due more to the way

he looked over his half-glasses than to a problem with his posture. I first got to know Rose from a distance, talking to him on the phone from the Queens courthouse when he filled in for Baird at lunchtime.

“You up?” he’d ask from his seat in the city room in Manhattan, meaning was I free to take on an assignment.

“Baird’s got me working a Sunday piece,” I would say more often than not.

“Then who’s going to check out the slips?” he asked, referring to crime reports that the police provided the press. “We’re still putting out a daily, you know. ”

With that he’d slam down the phone and try to find another leg-man to check the police slips.

Two years later, when I was on cityside I learned that he might be a cranky editor, but in the 1930s and ’40s Jerry had been the News reporter assigned to the Murder Inc. story. He wrote the original text to the mythical stories about Louis “Lepke” Bucholder, Dutch Schultz and Legs Diamond. At one time, the veterans in the city room told me, Jerry had a price on his head.

Another mob reporter I admired was a guy, let’s call him Paulie, of College Point, Queens. Short and stout, he was a one-time police reporter who couldn’t write too well but whose instincts on crime news were valued at my paper and others. He had a nondescript, long-since-faded tattoo on his forearm and a drooping black mustache. Shortly before I came to the city, Paulie had been taken out of police headquarters and made an assignment editor on the city desk.

In that post he acted as a kind of alter ego to the city editor, helping decide how the police slips were handed out to reporters and how the news staff responded in the first critical moments after we learned a crime had occurred. Paulie was able to sift through a lot of garbage easily and keep the newspaper from wasting time on stories that wouldn’t pan out. He could also spot the Big One, and his news sense was dead-on perfect. Paulie also brought a special knowledge to the task: His father had been a button man with the Gambinos.

“He hates ’em,” a colleague assured me, “no need to worry. ”

The fact that a son of the Mafia might be respectfully employed at the News didn’t seem so out of place to me. People have to work. Even bad guys can be loving family men and raise good kids. And, to

be fair, this was the city room where a propaganda agent for the Irish Republican Army was employed on the wire desk. I learned this later from another colleague who told how, in tracking down an IRA story in Inwood, Manhattan, the propagandist had left an IRA contact his city room phone number. A clandestine call from an IRA spokesman later came in near deadline. During the conversation my reporter colleague heard familiar noises of clacking typewriters over the phone.

“Where you calling from?” he inquired.

“If you turn around, I’m waving at you.”

The reporter turned around. There, 40 feet away, was a gray-haired Irishman in his late fifties wearing a cardigan. He had a thin smile and gray-green eyes. “Howdy, boyo,” he said into the phone, looking over his glasses.

Another crime reporter I tried to emulate was Eddie Kirkman, who had an Irish mother and German father. Accordingly, he could be as sweet as a spaniel or dedicated as a Doberman, whichever. It didn’t matter so long as he got the information and the story first. He thought nothing of squiring Mafia hangers-on, taking them out all night drinking and dancing in pursuit of information, or even visiting clandestine social clubs on President Street, Brooklyn, or Mott Street in Manhattan to find conversation and color. His police contacts trusted Kirkman with their lives.

I often teamed up with veteran police reporter Bill Federici; we worked together on the Sultans of Smut series. Federici had returned to the Daily News after a stint as deputy to Special Prosecutor Maurice Nadjari, who had been appointed by Gov. Nelson Rockefeller in the early 1970s to root out corruption in state and municipal government. Federici helped Nadjari with his public relations, handling press queries, and engineered the prosecutor’s reputation for fearless honesty.

As a young reporter in the 1950s, Federici got to know mobster Frank Costello when he became famous during the Kefauver hearings as the gangland boss whose gravelly voice and dignified bearing came alive on the television screen. Viewers never saw his face, however, since the camera focused only on his hands. Senator Estes Kefauver (D-Tenn.) held the hearings into organized crime and Costello was afforded the courtesy because of his cooperation. In those days Costello showed up frequently at police precinct headquarters for

questioning. Reporters routinely followed him in and out to ask questions. One of them was Federici, then a legman gathering news to feed to rewriters, who would chat with the crime boss.

“Take a look at this,” Federici said to me one evening in 1978 at the News, taking out a folder he had retrieved from the photo files. A black and white picture showed a youthful Federici walking down the stairs behind Costello as they left a midtown station house. “Yeah, Costello said I was his favorite reporter,” he told me.

My partner on the Ianniello story had been Paul Meskill, a veteran organized crime expert who had three decades of experience on several New York papers as a police reporter and rewrite man. Meskill was known for his eccentric choice of clothing. During the winter, he often appeared in the newsroom looking like a British dandy in an old-fashioned three-piece suit, silk scarf, homburg hat and silver-handled walking stick. In the summer, he switched to oversize Hawaiian shirts. Meskill had other eccentricities. He would not leave the building on spot news, and since he was so skilled at rewrite, assignment editors stopped asking him. He stayed on the rewrite bank, occupied with his story of the day, and on whatever longer-range piece might be occupying him at the moment. During the period when the Son of Sam dominated the news, Meskill spent hours attempting to unravel the satanic imagery of Sam’s letters. He interviewed dozens of experts on witchcraft and combed books on the occult. Meskill was also the author of several books on organized crime and had excellent sources in every investigative agency imaginable.

Meskill and I had worked closely together on the Ianniello story. After we got beat by the Times on that one, Meskill concentrated on the investigative work of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, cajoling his sources for leads that would help him break the truth behind President Kennedy’s murder.

We continued to work together during this time. Then in the fall of 1977, Meskill heard about an obscure committee witness named Marita Lorenz, who lived in an East Side high-rise condominium and had a story to tell about another guy Meskill had interviewed in years past—Frank Sturgis, the Watergate burglar whom we had learned during that investigation the CIA had once hired to kill Fidel Castro.

Our excuse to bite into this meat was that Lorenz, the mother of

two teenagers, was dating a guy who was under police surveillance by an organized crime task force in midtown. As police looked into this guy and his nightclub, they heard of allegations by Lorenz against Sturgis that they could not ignore: She said the former Watergate burglar was the man on the grassy knoll, the by-now mythical area ahead and to the right on Elm Street in Dealey Plaza, where at the moment of President Kennedy's murder witnesses turned their heads to look and more than 20 people said they had heard shots. The cops told Meskill, who set me loose on the story.

I got an education fast. Meskill told me that Lorenz's story had its origins in the romantic world of revolutionary Cuba. At the time Fidel Castro took over the country on Jan. 1, 1959, Lorenz was the 18-year-old daughter of the captain of a West German luxury liner docked in Havana's harbor. She became caught up in the excitement of Castro's accession, along with the rest of the Cuban capital. During the festivities, Castro came aboard the luxury ship for a visit and saw Lorenz. They struck up a romance. When Lorenz's father told his daughter it was time to go home, she decided to stay behind.

While this romance was blossoming, Castro's chief of security for the revolution's modest air force was an American-born soldier of fortune named Francisco Fiorini. It happened that Fiorini, later known as Frank Sturgis, would become disgusted with Castro's growing sympathy for Communism. Sturgis later was recruited by the CIA station chief in Santiago de Cuba to work for the United States.

When Castro first came to power, he let American mobsters continue operating the casinos they had so eagerly built up under Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista. In March 1959, Castro appointed Sturgis to supervise the gambling business as "minister for games of chance." During his involvement with the casinos, Sturgis got on friendly terms with racketeers, including casino operator Santos Trafficante. But Castro soon became disenchanted with the mob, telling Sturgis: "I'm going to run all these fascist mobsters, all these American gangsters, out of Cuba. Cuba for Cubans." He seized the gangsters' casinos and other rackets and put them out of business, costing the mobsters millions.

Meanwhile, as Castro consolidated power, the CIA began plotting his demise. From the Church committee and other sources I learned the strategy to get rid of Castro dated to Dec. 11, 1959, when CIA Director Allen Dulles recommended to President Eisenhower that Castro had to go. Dulles told Eisenhower that he and Western hemisphere chief J. C. King had concluded that after 11 months in power, Castro was too big a problem for the United States to tolerate. After all, he had seized U.S. businesses and begun murdering and terrorizing opponents so he could consolidate power. Most important, Castro had become a Communist and was now a puppet of the distant Soviet Union—except that he was a mere 90 miles from the States, and eager to expand revolution in the Western Hemisphere. To the U.S. government locked in the grip of the Cold War against an enemy with nuclear power, the reality of a Red in charge of Cuba was too much.

As the CIA began organizing its plans to combat this Cold War threat, the Mafia had its own reasons to want Castro dead. Now that the mobsters had lost their foothold in Cuba, the Mafia—among them financial wizard Lansky in Miami, Marcello of New Orleans, Chicago's Giancana and Trafficante—put out a \$1 million contract for Castro's life. Among those who knew about the planned hit was Sturgis, who would become a go-between for the mob and the CIA.

In August 1960, as Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy vied for the presidency, Sheffield Edwards, the CIA's director of security, was assigned to handle the Castro hit. Cuban exiles in Florida, Louisiana and elsewhere in the Southeast were organized into resistance troops. Some were more independent than others, and some chose to find sponsors other than the CIA. One such group was called the Cuban Revolutionary Council, whose New Orleans chapter was led by Sergio Arcacha Smith. It was financed by Carlos Marcello, the Louisiana crime boss. The idea was to time Castro's murder with the exiles' armed return to Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in a military assault being planned by the CIA for the spring of 1961.

It happened that in Las Vegas a trusted go-between had hatched an idea that began the odd alliance. Former FBI agent Robert Maheu, a frequent CIA frontman who had PR operations in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, got wind of the government's plan from his former FBI colleague James P. O'Connell, who was the CIA support chief for an

ever-widening anti-Castro plan that was now dubbed Operation Mongoose. Maheu had underworld contacts and knew of the gangsters' plans to kill Castro and reestablish themselves in Cuba. Maheu was also a pal of billionaire Howard Hughes and of Teamsters defense attorney Edward Bennett Williams of Washington, D.C. Maheu also kept up with racketeer pal Johnny Roselli.

Perhaps the mob and the CIA could work together, Maheu told O'Connell. The CIA support chief in turn suggested that Maheu sound out Roselli, the Capones' man in Los Angeles, about killing Castro. Roselli introduced Maheu to Giancana, chief of the Capones in Chicago, and to Trafficante, the mob boss of Florida and former Havana casino owner who had been imprisoned by Castro and had bribed his way to freedom.

By September 1960, CIA security director Edwards and deputy Richard Bissell agreed on a plan to have Giancana, Roselli and Trafficante organize and execute the plot to murder Castro. Dulles and CIA Deputy Director General Charles P. Cabell signed off on the plan, which had been ironed out at a meeting that month at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach hosted by O'Connell and attended by Maheu, Giancana, Roselli and Trafficante. The idea was that a team of Trafficante's Cuban associates now in Florida, Louisiana and Cuba would receive CIA assistance to murder Castro.

One of the CIA operatives involved in working with Cuban hit squads was Howard Hunt, whose code name was Eduardo. Hunt, a sometime fiction writer, wrote a potboiler before the Bay of Pigs invasion entitled called *Bimini Run*. One character in the book was a soldier of fortune named "Hank Sturgis."

The real Sturgis, I later learned from Meskill's reporting, had been part of an anti-Castro hit squad called Operation 40. Sturgis knew Lorenz was Castro's girlfriend and part of his inner circle. He set up a secret meeting with the 18-year-old girl in mid-1959 and warned her that Castro was planning to murder her. Convinced by Sturgis that Castro had turned against her, Lorenz fled Cuba for Florida, where she became involved in gunrunning to get weapons to Castro's enemies. Lorenz, feeling betrayed and grateful to Sturgis and the CIA for saving her life, agreed in 1960 to kill Castro. The plan was for her to feign a reconciliation and return to Cuba, meet Castro and put poisoned pills

in his drink. But en route from Miami she panicked and hid the pills in a jar of cold cream. She was taken to a Havana hotel, where she met Castro that evening. When she tried to retrieve the capsules, she found they had dissolved. Lorenz's murder mission failed.

By the time Lorenz and her story had surfaced in Manhattan in 1977, and had been reported by Meskill, most reporters were prepared to believe the worst about the truth behind President Kennedy's murder. Not only had the Church committee unearthed the plots to murder Castro, it also exposed realities that could poison the Kennedy legacy.

Many investigators—writers, lawyers, prosecutors, intelligence analysts, spies and hobbyists—would spend years plodding through public records before a coherent picture emerged. But in the fall of 1977, even the most thorough investigators could not fully comprehend, much less believe, the story of what had happened in the JFK assassination. I, for one, was lost in an underworld of shadows, of random, scattered facts. But I didn't care. For a reporter hunting the Big One, Lorenz's tale was irresistible, the overlapping of plots magnificent.

My time spent covering organized crime in New York bruised most myths and conventional wisdom I grew up with dealing with fairness, law and order, and justice in general. And as the facts presented themselves then and trickled down since, the Camelot myth of the Kennedys turned out to be a fraud, too. In fact, the relationships woven by Joe Kennedy and his sons, John and Robert, with La Cosa Nostra—from Boston in the 1920s to Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963—reflect a web of lust, scandal, betrayal and fraud so tangled that one would have to turn to fiction to find tragic truth so bizarre.

When viewed against the facts of organized crime in America, the evidence was there all along. From JFK's earliest days in politics, rumors had swirled about his father. If not widely known to the public, Joe Kennedy's history was known in police circles: Son of a Boston saloonkeeper and ward politician, and son-in-law to a popular but flawed Boston mayor, Joe had the brains to go to Boston Latin High School and Harvard University and into the world of high finance. People saw him as one tough cookie—a banker sharp enough,

for example, to sell all holdings before the stock market collapsed in 1929. He also possessed a hint of glamour, having been a money making if uninspired movie producer in Hollywood's early days and a somewhat shadowy racetrack owner and post-Prohibition era importer of liquor.

Kennedy was an early supporter of FDR, the first chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, and a U.S. Ambassador to Britain. His one unforgivable political sin was that as ambassador in London in the late 1930s, he was an isolationist, openly stating that the United States should stay out of the conflict in Europe. His political reputation never recovered. It was a cruel irony that his first son, Joe Jr., died in the war he had dreaded.

Yet the Mafia and its watchdogs in New York, Boston, Chicago, Las Vegas and Florida saw Joe Kennedy from a different perspective. They saw someone who probably had been a partner of Frank Costello when each had made the other rich as bootleggers during Prohibition. Costello and Kennedy were both savvy enough to have acted in 1934, in preparation for the end of Prohibition, to corner the best of the import market. The day the country went wet in January 1934, Kennedy's New York based Somerset Importers had the exclusive rights to import Gordon's Gin, Dewar's and Haig & Haig scotch whiskey. Costello's Alliance Distributors of New York had importing rights to House of Lords and King's Ransom scotches. Costello later boasted about it to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. Kennedy would often deny the relationship. Costello never did. Hoover had a file on Kennedy bursting with tidbits and rumors collected by his agents and during Hoover's frequent walks in Central Park with Costello in the '40s and '50s.

Kennedy was a reputed part-owner of Florida's Hialeah racetrack, a noted hangout not only for the sporting set but also for high-rolling gamblers and their gangland bookies as well. Kennedy was a frequent guest of a Miami Beach casino called the Colonial Inn, which Costello put together with the help of Meyer Lansky. Kennedy also liked going to the Cal-Neva club in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, where he was a consort of associates and guests of Chicago mob boss Sam Giancana, who, with Frank Sinatra, was a majority owner.

Kennedy's associations with mob leaders such as Costello, Lansky and Giancana were well known within La Cosa Nostra, which, like

any other organization, had its rumors and whispered truths. In this world, Kennedy may not have been “made” or an associate, but any lowlife racketeer or police investigator familiar with the codes of East Coast immigrant neighborhoods and their criminal underworld had only to look at the company Kennedy kept to conclude that Kennedy was probably wired up.

Tales about Kennedy and the mob swirled for years, particularly after John F. Kennedy’s murder. But it wasn’t until the Church committee got into the act that the most damaging information came to light. In December 1975, the committee report, in describing the CIA-mob connection, alluded to an unnamed woman who was a “close friend” of the president, Giancana and Los Angeles gangster Johnny Roselli.

Within days, the friend, Judith Campbell, called a press conference to say that yes, she knew all three and that her relations were of a “personal, close nature.” She later confirmed she had affairs with Kennedy and Giancana. Though more details of this relationship would come out only years later—involving celebrities such as Sinatra, the president’s brother-in-law Peter Lawford and glittering locales in Hollywood, Las Vegas and Miami Beach—the disclosure that the president had had an affair with the girlfriend of a Mafia don from Chicago who was also involved in plots to murder Castro was a sensation. These revelations by the Church committee in 1975 stimulated still more investigations into the truth behind the murder of President Kennedy.

The relationship between Campbell and Kennedy has been established by phone logs, records and testimony. In all, public records showed that she visited the White House 20 times and had phone conversations with Kennedy or his appointment secretary Ken O’Donnell 70 times from January 1961 until March 22, 1962, when they abruptly stopped after President Kennedy had a private lunch with FBI Chief Hoover.

The romance ended because Attorney General Robert Kennedy’s war on organized crime had led to the Oval Office.

Robert Kennedy’s role in this twisting saga adds a tragic dimension. For his part, Joe Kennedy’s associations with racketeers during Prohibition and in the years following could be forgiven in a later era as the transgressions of a colorful scoundrel. But for the president of the United States to consort with associates of organized crime and

have a sexual relationship with a mobster's girlfriend was another. Did JFK live a life of such privilege that he believed rules didn't apply to him? Was he so jazzed by the thrill of his liaisons that he was unable to contain them? There is no way of knowing, nor of knowing what the moralist younger brother, Robert, knew about his brother and father.

What is true, however, is that in the time between his graduation from law school in 1953 and the death of his brother 10 years later, Robert Kennedy waged the most successful assault on the mob in U.S. history.

In 1953, the year after John F. Kennedy was elected to the Senate from Massachusetts, Robert was hired, fresh out of law school, as a staff member of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Who can know what he knew or understood of his father's reputed relationship with Frank Costello when he began his apprenticeship in racket busting? Three years later, over the 1956 Christmas holiday, Robert told his father he was going to take a job as chief counsel to the soon-to-be-formed Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor and Management Fields. The young lawyer said that his assignment was to lead the committee, chaired by

Sen. John L. McClellan, an Arkansas Democrat, in an inquiry into labor unions and gangsters. Joe Kennedy didn't want his son to do this, and he said so, telling Robert he wouldn't solve the problem and would just make enemies. John, himself to be a member of the committee, was indifferent.

Robert was insistent, however, and took the job. What followed was a 30-month, groundbreaking, largest-ever congressional investigation of gangsters. Robert Kennedy led a staff of 100 accountants, lawyers and investigators who called some 1,500 witnesses in more than 500 hearings, producing some 14 million words of testimony that filled 20,432 pages. The intelligence generated by Robert Kennedy's work was staggering.

The committee focused on the Teamsters union and its president, Dave Beck, Beck's anointed successor, Jimmy Hoffa, and the Mafia. The theme throughout the hearings was that Hoffa was a tool of the mob, launching a feud between Robert Kennedy and Hoffa that would be a recurring theme in their lives, until Kennedy's murder in 1968

and Hoffa's disappearance July 30, 1975, just weeks after Giancana's murder.

During the period of Kennedy's Senate investigation, the internal world of La Cosa Nostra was stressed to the breaking point and the violent warfare was playing itself out on the pages of the Daily News, fueling the desire for more investigations. Vito Genovese, one of the mob's most ruthless rulers, had taken over the old Luciano mob from Costello in 1955 and was consolidating his power, removing Costello and later Albert Anastasia as underworld rivals by 1957.

Against this bloody backdrop, played out in crime stories and photos printed in the Daily News, the Senate investigators were conducting interviews about the nature of the mob violence. This new information carried the Kennedy probe into the summer of 1959 and produced a wealth of leads that kept government investigators and prosecutors busy for years. The McClellan committee published the names of 5,000 made mobsters in the United States, in effect hanging a target around the neck of every major mobster in America. Indeed, over the next five years, 96 criminal witnesses who came before the committee were convicted of various offenses, and Kennedy earned a reputation as a fearless and skillful crusader against the Mafia. When his brother Jack installed him as attorney general in January 1961, the mob knew it had a powerful enemy.

When he became attorney general, however, Robert Kennedy found out Hoover's FBI was spending its time worrying about Reds, not mobsters. The FBI had only four agents working on organized crime in New York. Nationwide, the entire bureau had only a dozen agents to target organized crime. Kennedy ordered Hoover to beef up the FBI's mob investigations. Within the Justice Department itself, Kennedy expanded the Organized Crime and Racketeering Section by 400 percent and had aides draw up a list of targets—the nation's who's who in the mob. There was the top hierarchy of the Bonanno, Gambino, Genovese, Profaci and Lucchese families of New York, as well as Sam Giancana from Chicago, Johnny Roselli of Los Angeles, Santos Trafficante of Florida and Carlos Marcello of New Orleans. Kennedy initiated government prosecutorial powers that resulted in a 500 per-

cent increase in organized crime defendants in federal court and a 400 percent increase in convictions during his four years in office.

One of the gang leaders near the top of the Robert Kennedy's target list was Marcello, whose criminal empire across Louisiana and Texas pulled in an estimated \$1.6 billion a year. Marcello had appeared before the Senate committee and tangled with Kennedy on March 24, 1959.

Outside his area, Marcello's reputation was shadowy, but on his turf he was supreme. The Sicilian-style Mafia had been part of New Orleans for a century, but the modern Mafia in Louisiana sprang from an alliance between Gov. Huey Long and Frank Costello during Prohibition. Costello had heard about a young woman who was blackmailing Gov. Long with her pregnancy. He took steps to squelch her demands, and in gratitude Long invited Costello to New Orleans, where he invited him to cut a deal with Sam Corolla, Louisiana's traditional Mafia leader. Costello and Corolla agreed that Costello could bring 1,000 slot machines into Louisiana. Corolla put 250 of those machines under the control of Marcello, who ran rackets on the West Bank. Marcello was hitting his stride. At age 20 he had been sentenced to 14 years for robbery and assault, but in 1935 was pardoned by Gov. Long after serving only five years. He was arrested again on a range of charges and served 10 months in 1938.

After Corolla's deportation to Italy in 1947 for narcotics trafficking, Marcello rose to power, gaining such tight control over mob operations that all communications with Mafia members outside Texas and Louisiana had to go through him. For the syndicate's soldiers elsewhere in the United States, the only way to get into Marcello's area was through Costello, and after him, Genovese.

Marcello was well known to mob investigators in Washington from his appearance as a witness before the Senate committee in March 1959. In 1953, the feds had begun deportation proceedings, but his lawyers successfully delayed any judgment. What nagged the senators was that Marcello, who had a record and was widely suspected to be the crime boss of the Southeast, had not been born in the United States and was not a citizen. Why hadn't he been deported? Marcello's records indicated he was born in Guatemala, though they were widely assumed to be phony.

Kennedy ordered the Immigration and Naturalization Service to get hold of Marcello's birth records. Then the government acted. When Marcello showed up on April 4, 1961, on a routine visit to the INS office on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans, the feds picked him up, took him to the airport, flew him 1,200 miles to Guatemala City and dropped him off without so much as a phone call.

Marcello, his large family and associates were stunned. How could this be? After six weeks in Guatemala, he sneaked back into the States. The government got wind of his return and announced June 2 that he was back in country and in hiding. The government posted an \$835,396 tax assessment and indicted Marcello for illegal entry.

To Marcello, Kennedy's actions were more than odd, given his knowledge about the government's cooperation in the anti-Castro activities, about Joe Kennedy's relationship with Costello, about Giancana's girlfriend fooling around with Jack Kennedy, and about the Capones' helping him in West Virginia and Chicago. And at the time of President Kennedy's murder, Marcello was standing trial in New Orleans under a federal indictment. By the code of the street, the Kennedys weren't doing right.

As I studied the records and clips in the fall of 1977, I kept thinking about the story my cop pal Vinnie had told me in the West End Bar about the righteous judgment the underworld dealt to turncoats and informers.

THAT CONVERSATION ABOUT AN UNDERWORLD'S JUSTICE stayed with me for years—long after I went on to other things. Yet it motivated me that day and in the months and years since in the same way the NewsWalkers of the Union Army were motivated—I wanted to test the veracity of my leaders and learn who and what I could trust. I wanted to know what was going on. Records on the murder of President Kennedy that might still shed light on the truth are sealed—at the request of the victim's family and with the support of the U.S. government. Why?

What follows in this chronicle is a brief narrative that I, as a contemporary NewsWalker, piecing together what I've heard and read, would tell around a modern campfire. It probably isn't entirely correct and can't be the whole story. But based on what I knew from reporting in Queens and Manhattan, from the Church committee and subsequent House Assassinations committee, it is an outline of what probably happened.

At the time of Marcello's deportation in 1961, Robert Kennedy probably was ignorant of the connections between his brother, Campbell and Giancana, but he soon became aware that his family's political base was threatened by its association with Hollywood and the CIA's involvement with racketeers. On Feb. 27, 1962, Hoover wrote the attorney general a memo detailing a discovery from an FBI investigation in Las Vegas. The feds had caught a couple of gangsters operating illegal wiretaps on the phone of singer Phyllis McGuire. The wiretappers defended themselves by saying they were employed by Robert Maheu, a former FBI agent working for Howard Hughes, and by Sam Giancana.

When the FBI agents moved to charge Maheu and Giancana, they claimed immunity on the grounds that the wires had been sanctioned by the CIA. Hoover told Robert Kennedy that the CIA had confirmed the incredible fact of Maheu and Giancana working for the agency in a series of attempts to kill Castro. The wiretap was a favor for Giancana while he was plotting these missions. He had simply wanted to make sure that McGuire, his mistress, was not two-timing him with a Vegas comedian, and the CIA had gone along.

The FBI agents listened to the wires and found that McGuire herself was miffed because Giancana was friendly with a woman from Los Angeles named Campbell whom Sinatra had introduced to President Kennedy. These tangled relationships were an open secret among the Las Vegas lounge lizards. The FBI checked further and learned that Campbell had called the White House 70 times since Kennedy moved in. Hoover eventually would identify 32 other women who had visited Kennedy's White House for personal rendezvous.

During his private lunch with the president on March 22, 1962, Hoover disclosed not only that the FBI investigation had revealed Campbell's ties to Roselli and Giancana and calls from Campbell to the White House, but also that Giancana and other thugs were set to twist the federal government's arm to go easy on Giancana, Marcello and their mob pals. The idea was to have Kennedy friend Frank Sinatra call the attorney general and ask for the favor.

Additional incriminating evidence later came from an FBI wire on Philadelphia mob boss Angelo Bruno which turned up a conversation between Bruno and a Pittston, Pennsylvania, capo named Russell Buffalino. In the July 17, 1962, conversation, the Pennsylvania gangsters confirmed they knew how Marcello had asked Trafficante and Giancana to persuade Sinatra to intercede on Marcello's behalf in the deportation proceedings.

Hoover told President Kennedy in March how the mobsters intended to get Sinatra to ask that his brother, the attorney general, ease up on the prosecution of Marcello. It was that afternoon, following Hoover's lunch with the president, that President Kennedy had his last phone conversation with Campbell from the White House, and a planned trip to Sinatra's retreat in Palm Springs, Calif., was abruptly canceled.

The fact that Hoover had learned such seemingly incredible details about the CIA and Mafia plots, and about Kennedy's relations with a mobster's girlfriend, compromised the president forever—not only with the Mafia, but also with any renegade elements of the FBI and CIA who might happen along. Kennedy was now a tool in their hands. Any of them could disclose the truth about these revelations and Kennedy would be driven from office in disgrace. The nation's

honor would be betrayed—and the government’s prosecution of gangsters crippled.

But Campbell was not the only woman in the picture, nor the most recognizable by far. Word had it within the mob that the president had also had an affair with Marilyn Monroe. Hoover and the FBI learned that wiretappers on assignment from Teamsters leader Jimmy Hoffa had bugged the California homes of both Monroe in Brentwood and actor Peter Lawford in Santa Monica. Lawford was married to the President’s sister Pat. These bugs captured what Hoffa believed were the sounds of President Kennedy and Monroe together.

After Hoover warned him off, Kennedy also stopped taking calls from Monroe by mid-July 1962. Monroe began to call the White House at off-hours, demanding attention and threatening to go public. Robert Kennedy reportedly went to see Monroe at Lawford’s house and tell her to abandon the liaison with his brother. Hoffa’s wiretappers eavesdropped on this meeting and a later visit by the attorney general to Monroe’s Brentwood home. In August 1962, while the attorney general was attending a lawyers’ convention at the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco, Monroe called the hotel several times to talk to him. Her friends later said she got anonymous calls Aug. 3 and 4, telling her: “Leave Robert Kennedy alone, you tramp.” The evening of Aug. 4, 1962, she called Lawford, upset. Later that night Monroe, 36, died of a drug overdose. One of the first people on the scene after her death was Lawford.

Years later the ailing Lawford, after a lifetime of drink and debauchery, reportedly told his fourth wife, Patricia Seaton, that the day Monroe died, she had tried to reach Robert Kennedy to rescue her relationship with the president. When she was rebuffed, she called Lawford and told him she was depressed. After her death and before police arrived, Lawford said he had cleaned her room of any incriminating letters and information regarding his brothers-in-law.

Despite this sensational web of intrigue, and regardless of what was said between Hoover and the president, the attorney general never relaxed his assault on the mob. An FBI memo written Oct. 1, 1962, described how Sinatra had called Robert Kennedy but had only made matters worse. The attorney general cut Sinatra off and severed his contacts with the Kennedys, then intensified his attack on the mob.

As for the CIA, Robert Kennedy had demanded a report on its links with the mob. On May 7, CIA Director of Security Sheffield Edwards wrote the attorney general about the plots to assassinate Castro: "Knowledge of this project during its life was kept to a total of six persons. and there were no memoranda on the project, nor were there other written documents or agreements. The project was duly orally approved by the said senior officials of the agency."

Shortly thereafter, the attorney general approved the revival of the mission against Castro, this time without the assistance of the mob chieftains, and he took a personal interest in the plans. There would be eight separate attempts to kill Castro, involving poison pens, pills, cigars, exploding seashells and a contaminated diving suit, all of which had been disclosed by the Church committee as I was delving into the history of these ignominious dealings.

The problem was that the CIA turned to the same gang of killers, spooks, renegades and soldiers of fortune it had used before. Mob bosses such as Giancana, Trafficante and Marcello might not be on the CIA payroll, but they were up to speed on what was happening. And to them, one arm of the government led by President Kennedy was hiring their gang members to do Cold War wet work, while the other arm led by Robert Kennedy was trying to throw them in jail.

To this NewsWalker, a picture began emerging of a community of evil loose on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico between Louisiana and Florida, revolving around the mob, gunrunners, renegade federal agents and anti-Castro exiles working in the shadowy world of the Cuban community with CIA training. There remains no proof. The witnesses are now, for the most part, dead, liars or tellers of tales that cannot be verified. Yet, from this community came Kennedy's killer. Whether he was a lone nut or a skilled marksman looking for trouble and manipulated in a sophisticated conspiracy remains an unsolved mystery. However, when you string the anecdotes together and fill in the background on the canvas, the outline of the Big One emerges. Still not ready for Page 1, but the Big One nonetheless.

On Sept. 11, 1962, Marcello was visiting with a friend named Carlo Roppolo and a Las Vegas gumshoe named Edward Becker at Marcello's Town & Country Inn on Airline Highway in New Orleans. The group discussed, among other things, Marcello's tomato canning

business. Late in the day, they went to Marcello's 6,400-acre compound in Metairie called Churchill Farms.

They went to a shack deep in the swamp, and after more drinks and talk, Becker mentioned Marcello's troubles with Robert Kennedy's Justice Department. Marcello became enraged, cursing and spitting hate, promising revenge. Marcello turned to Becker and said: "In Sicily, if you want to kill a dog, you don't cut off the tail, you cut off the head. The dog will keep biting you if you cut off the tail. But if the dog's head is cut off, the dog will die, tail and all." To cut off the dog's head, he told Becker, should be done as in Sicily: You get a moron, a retarded boy, a nut, to take all the heat.

In Miami later that month, Jose Aleman Jr., the Cuban exile leader and financier, met with Santos Trafficante, who had just come back from a meeting with Marcello in New Orleans. Trafficante and Aleman were both connected to the antiCastro network manipulated by the CIA. Aleman, son of a former Cuban cabinet minister and very active in the exile movement, was close to many of the CIA's principal Cuban conspirators in the plot to kill Castro, and his cousin had helped Trafficante get out of Cuba after Castro took over the government.

That day, Aleman was trying to persuade Trafficante to help him secure a \$1.5 million loan from Hoffa's Teamsters for a large condominium project. During the conversation, the subject of Kennedy's prosecution of Hoffa and the Teamsters came up, and Trafficante told Aleman that John Kennedy would be killed before the election in November 1964. It turned out that Aleman was also an FBI informant and, after meeting with Trafficante, he went to the FBI's Miami office and told his control agent what Trafficante said. Years later, Louisiana Teamsters official Edward Partin confirmed that such talk was circulating among the Teamsters. Partin said that in the summer of 1962, Hoffa himself spoke of killing Robert Kennedy and perhaps even the president to get the federal government off the Teamsters' back.

Other anecdotes were available to the House Committee as well. Investigators learned that in March 1963, in a gin joint known as "Tregle's" on Airline Highway, a bartender named Eugene De Laparra overheard owner Bernard Tregle, an associate of Marcello, discuss a plot to kill JFK with Norman Le Blanc, a horse trainer, and a third man known as the "professor." De Laparra, a former Marine, saw that the

men were looking at a magazine, pointing at an ad for a foreign-made rifle that sold for \$12.95.

De Laparra, a groom at a New Orleans racetrack who took care of Marcello's horses, doubled as an FBI informer. Years later he said that such talk wasn't an isolated event. Marcello's brother Tony had said the word was out to "get" the Kennedy family. And House Committee investigators also found that in December 1963, FBI agents investigating Kennedy's killing and the role of Lee Harvey Oswald were told by an informer in New Orleans that in April of that year, while the informer was having dinner with friends at the Town and Country, a young man the informer identified as Oswald was given an envelope by a man later identified as Joseph Poretto, the restaurant manager and a ranking member of Marcello's mob.

How Oswald came to be in New Orleans in April 1963 is a tangled tale that still doesn't add up just right. As a teenager, Oswald attended New Orleans' Beauregard Junior High and lived with his mother, Marguerite, in a small apartment over a saloon at 126 Exchange Alley in the Vieux Carre district. The neighborhood was home to numerous well-known pool halls, bars and gambling joints dominated by the Marcello organization; it was the habitat of bookies, whores and amoral homosexuals.

Oswald's mother was a friend of Marcello's chauffeur and bodyguard Sam Termine. She was also on friendly terms with Clem Sehart, a New Orleans attorney who helped her underage son get into the Marines in 1956 and who was a friend of Louis Rousell, a corrupt New Orleans financier with money-laundering ties to Marcello's mob.

Growing up, Oswald was close to an uncle named Charles Murret, who was married to his mother's sister, Lillian. Oswald's father had died when he was 2 months old, and Murret was as much of a father as Oswald had. Murret, known in the New Orleans underworld as Dutz, was a mid-level bookie in the Marcello network working under Sam Saia, an intimate of the Marcello mob who was one of the biggest and most powerful operators of illegal betting books in the state.

To judge from the record, Oswald was unstable by any measure. In 1959, three years after he joined the Marines, he defected to the

Soviet Union, where he married a Russian woman named Marina. In time, however, he soured on the Soviet Union and in June 1962 returned to the United States, settling in Dallas. Ten months later he quit his job without telling his wife, and within a week he was suspected of firing a rifle shot at Maj. Gen. Edward Walker, a member of the right-wing John Birch Society, through the front window of Walker's home.

On April 24, the day the White House announced that the president was going to visit Dallas, Oswald took a bus from there to New Orleans, where he moved in with his Uncle Dutz and Aunt Lillian. By May 9, Oswald was in his own New Orleans apartment, paying \$65 a month. Wife Marina and year-old daughter June left Dallas and joined him May 11. Oswald got a job as a maintenance worker at a coffee company; making \$1.50 an hour, but he rarely went to work, and within two months was fired.

Dutz later told the Warren Commission that he had lent Oswald money to get him started. Oswald was already known in New Orleans circles as an underworld hanger-on. Informers later testified that Oswald, like his uncle, worked in the Marcello gambling network as a runner and collector in Saia's operation, based at Felix Oyster House in the French Quarter, not far from Marcello's ShoBar on Bourbon Street.

What Oswald seemed to like most was trouble. On May 26 he wrote the national director of the Fair Play for Cuba Committee in Tampa about setting up a chapter in New Orleans, which he did, he being the only member. A few weeks later, he made a spectacle of himself passing out proCastro leaflets on the Dumaine Street wharf, where the aircraft carrier WASP was moored. In July, a group of Cuban exiles from Miami went to New Orleans to join the antiCastro guerrilla training camp at Lacombe, north of the city, near a favored Marcello hunting preserve and lodge. The next month Oswald showed up at the camp. Posing as a pal of antiCastro exiles, Oswald told leader Carlos Bringuier that he wanted to use his Marine experience to train exiles and bring down the Castro regime.

Then Oswald got into a fistfight on Aug. 9 with Bringuier's group for distributing proCastro literature on Canal Street in New Orleans. The police jailed him for disturbing the peace. Oswald was bailed out and his fine paid by Emile Bruneau, a liquor store owner who was a

friend of the family—and of Poretto, manager of Marcello’s Town and Country. Oswald continued getting into scrapes. On Aug. 14 he drew attention to himself again by distributing pro-Castro leaflets at the New Orleans Trade Mart.

Another oddball in the Marcello mix was a pilot named David Ferrie, who styled himself a bishop of a church he had founded and a would-be cancer researcher. Ferrie had a correspondence course degree in psychology from a diploma mill in Italy; hence his nicknames “the doctor” and “the professor.” In the 1950s he ran guns to Castro and, after Castro turned Marxist, flew bombing raids for anti-Castro forces.

Before being fired by Eastern Airlines from his job as a pilot, Ferrie joined the New Orleans branch of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, the Miami-based militant group. The council’s New Orleans delegate was Sergio Arcacha Smith, whose chief financial backer was Marcello. G. Wray Gill and Smith represented Ferrie in a wrongful termination lawsuit against Eastern. Gill liked Ferrie and hired him as an investigator in March 1962. A month later, Ferrie was hired by Guy Bannister Associates, a private investigations agency located at 544 Camp St., which was also working on the Marcello deportation case. By 1963, Gill had Ferrie on the Marcello defense team and Ferrie met regularly with Gill and Marcello at the Town and Country office.

In the summer of 1963, witnesses told the Warren Commission and the House Assassination committee that they began seeing Ferrie and Oswald together. One explanation was that Oswald was a former Louisiana Civil Air Patrol cadet under Ferrie’s command. Another thing connecting Ferrie and Oswald was that the address printed on Fair Play for Cuba Committee leaflets that Oswald handed out in August 1963 was 544 Camp St., the address of Bannister Associates.

Oswald’s actions remain murky, as do Ferrie’s connection to them. In spy circles there is a technique called creating a legend—establishing false credentials for a phantom person. Since 1960, the FBI had had information someone was trying to run an Oswald double while he was in Russia. Why is unclear. FBI witnesses said they had seen or associated with Oswald, his double or maybe even his triple in Mexico, Texas and New Orleans. Reports conflict, and descriptions of the man “Oswald” vary so often that it appears someone was deliber-

ately carving a trail, a red herring, to be followed later, perhaps to create confusion and waste investigators' time. What the "real" Oswald knew about all these so-called doubles is unknown.

Setting aside questions about "doubles," there were stories published in New Orleans newspapers on Sept. 13, 1963, which reported that President Kennedy was going to Texas on Nov. 21 or 22. Evidence shows that on Oct. 3, Oswald went to Dallas and looked for work at a spot on Industrial Boulevard, one of three possible motorcade routes to be used by Kennedy. He was turned down. He spent a few nights in the Dallas YMCA, visiting his wife and child in Irving, where they had moved in with him. On Oct. 14 he rented an apartment at 1026 North Beckley in the Oak Cliff section of Dallas without telling his wife. The next day Oswald was hired to fill orders at the Texas School Book Depository, and on Oct. 16 he reported for work.

Despite the fact that his schedule called for him to work from 8 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday with 45 minutes for lunch, Oswald—or someone looking like him—was seen in several conspicuous spots elsewhere during work hours. On Nov. 1, for example, a fellow named Oswald was in Fort Worth buying ammunition. Three days later, "Oswald" was seen picking up Western Union money orders in the Dallas area. And a man named Oswald brought a rifle to an Irving gun show and had it rigged with a telescopic sight.

Was the KGB at work? The CIA? The Mafia? Or rogue elements of each working together or at cross-purposes? Trying to understand how Oswald could be operating in so many places raises several twisted possibilities: Could elements of any or all three organizations have been pursuing their own purposes to create a patsy they could use in a murder? Or could one be trying to make it look like another was responsible? Or could it be that New Orleans in the fall of 1963 was so rife with mobsters, spooks and Cuban assassin wannabes that they couldn't help but get in each others' business, creating a messy conspiratorial backdrop for what was really just the act of one deranged man? It was, and continues to be, a struggle to get a fix on Lee Harvey Oswald. What is fact is that Oswald was a product of the New Orleans lowlife, with mobsters in his family background. He left home as a teenager to join the Marines, defected to Russia, married, got bored, came home and hopped from job to job, town to town. Oswald associ-

ated with political extremists and gangsters and, at 24, was an obviously unstable ex-Marine with rifle training, looking for trouble. Other key facts:

- Joe Civello, Marcello's long-time deputy in Texas, which the Mafia recognized as his domain, met with Dallas Police Sgt. Patrick T. Dean after the mob sit-down in Apalachin, N.Y. Dean was in charge of basement security the day Jacob Leon Rubinstein, aka Jack Ruby, shot Oswald.
- Ruby had been sent to Dallas by the Capones in 1947 to help set up operations for the Chicago mob. The Capones' plans for Dallas never worked out, and the territory was taken over by Marcello's gang. Ruby became friendly with Dallas police. He also ran strip joints and frequented the Egyptian Lounge, run by his friend Sam Campisi, whose partner was Civello. Campisi did business with Marcello's operations, sharing slots, jukes, and strip talent back and forth between New Orleans and Dallas. Ruby frequently visited Marcello's establishments in New Orleans.
- In August and October 1963, phone records show Ruby, broke at the time, was in touch with New Orleans racketeers. He made 13 one-minute calls to a former partner in Shreveport, La., who was a known associate of Campisi and Santos Trafficante. Ruby also met with a range of mob associates; the FBI sighted him in Miami with Johnny Roselli. Campisi had dinner with Ruby the night before JFK's assassination and was Ruby's first visitor in jail, dropping by eight days after the assassination.

Whatever we might learn about the underworld, the legit world's Cold War policy makers were also deeply involved in intrigues. We know that the US government had been in the business of killing foreign leaders. The world of the Cold War was a dangerous place and this was a muscular period for the Kennedy administration.

Shortly after Robert Kennedy learned about the links between the CIA and the mob and about his older brother's sexual liaisons, he established that only six persons inside the government knew of the anti-Castro plot while it was going on and that there were no memoranda or other written documents or agreements. Midway through

1962, Kennedy approved the revival of the get-Castro mission, this time without the assistance of the mob chieftains. He took a personal interest in the plans, which were ongoing. The plots were no secret in Cuba. Castro told Associated Press reporter Daniel Hacker on Sept. 7, 1963, that since U.S. leaders were trying to murder him, he was prepared to do the same to them. At the time, the Kennedy administration was busy plotting government overthrows elsewhere. The U.S.-backed coup against South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem resulted in Diem's murder on Nov. 1, 1963. On the day President Kennedy was killed, a CIA-inspired group called AMLASH was still trying to engineer Castro's murder.

On the domestic front, the "Get Hoffa" team in the Robert Kennedy Justice Department finally obtained indictments against the Teamsters boss in 1963, first for jury tampering and a month later for fraud. The attorney general also wanted to get the FBI geared up to fight organized crime and engineered the testimony of mobster Joe Valachi of the Genevose crime family before the Senate committee chaired by McClellan. Valachi's revelations about the inner workings of La Cosa Nostra were a sensation, filling the press and newsreels and creating a wealth of intelligence about New York's five crime families. Robert Kennedy called the Valachi testimony the greatest intelligence breakthrough in the history of organized crime.

Robert Kennedy was still after Marcello, too, pressuring Hoover to develop information for his prosecution. In response, Hoover issued direct orders to the FBI's New Orleans office on Feb. 15, 1963, to get Marcello. He was charged with conspiracy to commit fraud by obtaining a forged Guatemalan birth certificate and passport; perjury; and unlawful entry into the United States as a deported alien. The trial began in federal court in New Orleans on Nov. 4, 1963. During the trial, Oswald associate David Ferrie worked on the defense team, meeting often with Marcello at the Town and Country. Three hours after Kennedy was murdered in Dallas, the jury in New Orleans federal court found Marcello not guilty.

After President Kennedy's murder, the Warren Commission and its staff reached an obvious conclusion quickly: Oswald was the shooter.

Had he lived, he'd have been convicted in any court, but now that he was dead, the rest of the story was just unprovable speculation, in which official Washington had no interest.

Many people had reasons to keep the shooting simple: President Lyndon Johnson didn't want war with the Russians and feared Oswald's time in the Soviet Union might cause trouble with anti-communist Americans demanding revenge. Hoover didn't want to explain how he had so much information and hadn't prevented the murder. The CIA wanted to keep mum about its deal with the mob. In fact, the day after the murder, CIA Director John McCone went to see Robert Kennedy and told him the CIA had concluded that the anti-Castro plots that the attorney general himself had supervised had somehow backfired in Castro's retaliation against JFK.

But imagine how Marcello felt? Regardless of what the Warren Commission would determine, Marcello knew that a nephew of one of his bookies was named as Kennedy's killer, that an associate of his Dallas deputy had killed Oswald, that his private lawyer David Ferrie had been arrested in New Orleans days after the assassination for conspiracy to kill Kennedy, that his brother and associates had been questioned about Oswald being seen at the Town and Country, and that Bourbon Street regulars were being questioned about Ruby's connections in New Orleans.

Marcello may have beaten the federal rap by tampering with the jury, but he must have known he could not escape a charge of conspiracy to murder the president of the United States. Yet Marcello remained at large, unindicted and unmolested, the head of an organized crime empire, which the following year generated \$1.11 billion in revenues, making it the largest industry in Louisiana, according to Senate investigators.

In January 1967, Roselli, the Capones' man in Los Angeles, was in jail and about to be deported to Italy as a result of racketeering. In an effort to save himself, Roselli told his lawyer how the CIA had contracted with the mob to kill Castro.

Washington soon buzzed with rumors. On Feb. 13, 1967, Hoover learned that columnist Drew Pearson had told Chief Justice Earl Warren about the CIA-mob murder pact. On March 4, a secretary

working for Robert Kennedy, now a Senator representing New York, asked Hoover's office for a copy of the 1962 memo that CIA Director of Security Sheffield Edwards had written to Kennedy at the Justice Department about the CIA-mob assassination plots. Pearson's syndicated column about Roselli appeared nationwide three days later.

A month after Rosselli began talking to federal prosecutors about the CIA-mob deal, other efforts to reconsider the Kennedy murder surfaced. In New Orleans, District Attorney Jim Garrison announced that despite the Warren Commission's findings, he had considered Ferrie a chief suspect in his investigation three years earlier of JFK's killing. At this point in 1967, Ferrie was put in protective custody, and word leaked that he would be indicted. But on Feb. 21 he was released.

The next day, reporters tracked Ferrie to his apartment, where they found him dead. The coroner said his death was of natural causes, a cerebral hemorrhage caused by an aneurysm, but the timing was so suspicious, conspiracy theorists were convinced Ferrie was murdered—by someone trying to cover up the truth. Also unexpectedly dead were two of Ferrie's closest friends. The day after Ferrie died, Eladio del Valle, once a member with Ferrie in the Cuban Revolutionary Council in New Orleans, was found dead with a bullet in the head in a Miami parking lot. Three months later, Ferrie's closest woman friend, physician Mary S. Sherman, was found murdered in her New Orleans apartment.

Garrison had targeted Ferrie despite the fact that Marcello was able to give him an alibi: At the time of Kennedy's murder, Ferrie was with Marcello in court in New Orleans. Marcello, however, was never a target of Garrison's investigation although federal organized crime investigators believed he should have been. On national TV the day after Ferrie's death, Garrison defended Marcello, who happened to live in the prosecutor's district, as a "respectable businessman." Garrison blamed JFK's assassination on right-wing businessmen and the CIA.

Moviemaker Oliver Stone later put this fantasy on film in the feature movie "JFK," crafting a script in which Garrison, played by actor Kevin Costner, the handsome leading man, took the position that the CIA and its squirrely right-wing friends killed Kennedy because he was going to withdraw U.S. forces from Vietnam. Sure...

MY NEWSWALKER'S VIEW OF THOSE DAYS would emerge in the months and years since. As far as I was concerned in the fall of 1977, the Kennedy assassination was the domain of the obsessed. Few understood or could connect the dots in any coherent way. The story of the Kennedy assassination was for crackpots, of whom there would be more than enough. It would be more than a year before the House Select Committee on Assassinations issued its report, and even that wouldn't explain JFK's murder sufficiently. In the meantime, a small industry of buffs, cranks, hard cases, hacks and publishers engaged in a quest to prove their own unique answers to the nagging and seemingly unanswerable question: Why?

Yet after the House panel was organized, an army of people either were sought or came forward to tell what they knew. Because of the Senate's work uncovering the CIA's campaign against Castro, Meskill had already interviewed Sturgis about his days in Operation 40 and learned about Marita Lorenz, the young woman he had hired to kill Castro but whose efforts were foiled when the poison pills to do the job dissolved in her cold cream.

As mentioned I got into this story one afternoon in late October 1977, when Meskill called me over.

"Marita gave Vinnie a line on Sturgis," he had said, referring to our police friend who was an organized crime expert.

By this time, I knew Meskill and Sturgis had gotten to know each other well and that Meskill had grown fond of the aging thug.

"Vinnie met Marita when he went to see her boyfriend about his midtown club," Meskill was saying. "Apparently Marita wants to tell what she knows about the Kennedy assassination."

"What would she know about that?" I asked.

"She says she has evidence to give the House Assassinations Committee that proves Sturgis was the man on the grassy knoll!"

"Proof!"

Meskill smiled. Talk of evidence was one thing, proof was another. But if we could get our hands on that proof first, we would have the biggest story of the age. Meskill admitted he had wanted to keep this to himself, but Vinnie had insisted that he bring me into it.

"He trusts you," Meskill explained, "and said you deserve a piece of this. He wants you to go see her later."

Meskill insisted we keep this quiet, trusting no one with the information, including the city desk. Meskill suspected the Genoveses had a mole on the desk. Meskill told the desk we were working on an organized crime connection with the assassination. Much of the background was in Meskill's head already. My first job was to get smart fast in preparation for our visit to Lorenz and our investigation into her "proof."

I absorbed details from the Senate CIA investigation and began reporting that would continue for years. Early on, I realized a window of time did exist in which the relationships between the anti-Castro Cubans, the Gulf of Mexico spies and the racketeers in New Orleans and Dallas could have encompassed the elements of conspiracy that Lorenz was talking about. It sounded crazy, but everything about this story was crazy. Now, about the proof...

The purpose of getting into this was a story, pure and simple. What would the story be, though? Would we get the proof, or just a woman's allegations against Sturgis? I tried to get an interview with Lorenz, but she wouldn't see anybody until after congressional staff members had talked with her. That took place on Saturday, Oct. 29, 1977, when she was interviewed by Gaeton Fonzi and A. Gonzales of the House staff. On Monday, I was prepared to visit her and do a preliminary story with Meskill to get things going for Tuesday's paper when Meskill called me midmorning, saying that something had gone wrong.

"Sturgis just called me from Miami. He's on his way to New York to see Lorenz today. I called Lorenz, and she said Sturgis threatened that unless she changed her story, there would be trouble. Marita is worried about her daughter. She said Monica had disappeared with a gun and vowed to shoot Sturgis when he shows up."

This was big trouble. Meskill told me he had some calls to make and to stand by until I heard from him. That night, which happened to be Halloween, Meskill called shortly after 7:30 and told me to get over to a saloon on the corner of 43rd and Third. I found Meskill seated with Detectives James Rothstein and Matthew Rosenthal of a midtown organized crime unit. We had worked with them before.

"Monica's just been arrested," Meskill was saying, referring to Lorenz's daughter. He explained that after he heard about the gun, he had called the NYPD and tracked down Detectives Terrance

McSwiggin and Brian Smith, who knew Lorenz. They heard Meskill out and knew what to do. They had just called and said they'd picked up Marita's 15-year-old daughter outside her mother's apartment house at East 89th Street and York Avenue. They found her hiding behind a bush with a .22 caliber pistol. Monica told the cops she had heard her mother tell of the threats and had purchased the pistol to stop Sturgis from harassing her mother.

The cops said Lorenz was scared to death to hear this kind of talk from her daughter. "Don't worry, Mother, I'll protect you," Monica had said, according to Lorenz's account to the police.

"That poor sonofabitch Sturgis wouldn't have known what hit him," Meskill was saying. "Monica is a tough kid, and she'd have shot him, sure. Ha! All these years of CIA and assassination shit, only to be plugged by a 15-year-old on the East Side! Frankie doesn't know he's just hit triple cherries on the dollar slots."

We talked about the logistics of what to do next. Lorenz said she'd swear out a complaint against Sturgis, which now enabled the cops to pick him up. Both Meskill and I wondered when we could get to see her and the supposed evidence.

"Later," Rosenthal said. "The task now is to get Frank before he gets to Lorenz."

The detectives said they'd get word to me when they had Sturgis out of harm's way. I went back to the city room and worked what I could into a story that was still in need of some facts. I wanted to wait for Sturgis's arrest before we printed anything about Monica. But one deadline after another passed. Then, just before the deadline to make the final edition, I got a call that Sturgis was under arrest. I got the bare details, turned the story in, got in a radio car with photographer Carmine Donofrio and sped to the 102nd Street station house.

Donofrio and I waited in front by the sergeant's desk. Finally, just after 1 a.m., detectives led Sturgis through the front door and over to the booking station. At 52, Sturgis was stocky and well-tanned. His strong square jaw was instantly recognizable from the thousands of photos I'd seem of the Watergate burglars. His normally well-groomed wavy hair was a bit mussed, though, and he looked confused. His brown trench coat was strained with his thick arms handcuffed behind his back.

I thought to myself: so who was this guy? Castro intimate and trai-

tor? Mob confidant? CIA hit man? Watergate criminal? Even the man on the grassy knoll, perhaps? How could such a notorious figure from the dark side look so, well, ordinary? Donofrio stepped behind the booking desk and leaned past the sergeant to get a photo.

Sturgis asked Rosenthal what was going on.

“These guys are from the Daily News,” the detective said.

“You want to say anything, Mr. Sturgis?” I asked, not sure what to expect.

Knowing Paul Meskill worked for the News perked him up. “That crazy broad! This whole thing is bullshit,” he said. “Where’s Paul?”

The next morning the city read in the Daily News that convicted Watergate burglar Frank Sturgis had been arrested and charged with coercing a witness to change her testimony before the House committee investigating the assassination of President Kennedy. This sensational news was picked up by the radio and TV news and broadcast all day. The story told New Yorkers that the complaint against the former CIA contract agent was filed by Marita Lorenz, a former undercover agent for both the FBI and the CIA. She said Sturgis threatened her unless she changed her story about how she, Sturgis, Oswald and three others rode in a car from Miami to Dallas a few days before President Kennedy’s murder. She said her traveling companions were members of Operation 40, a guerrilla organization of 30 members originally formed in 1960 by the CIA in preparation for the Bay of Pigs assault. Sturgis has admitted being a member of Operation 40 but said Lorenz’s story is bunk.

This incredible story had a bad odor, no question. It was very thin. But in the current press environment eager for more developments on the Kennedy assassination investigations, it was a sensation. The facts were fine. It was true: Lorenz’s daughter was picked up with a gun, waiting for Sturgis, a one-time CIA hit man and former Watergate burglar who Lorenz charged was part of a conspiracy to shoot Kennedy. But proof that Sturgis was on the grassy knoll? The story did not even approach that level.

I got to work early Tuesday, Nov. 1, and went to Manhattan Criminal Court for the Sturgis hearing before Judge Milton

Samorodin. Sturgis, still wearing the same clothing as the night before, looked even more tired and disoriented. Defense attorney Robert Goldfarb told the court that Sturgis was a “lecturer” with ties to the Miami community. The judge ordered Sturgis held on \$25,000 bond. The Daily News Page 1 the next morning had a shot of Sturgis being booked in the 102nd Street station house, next to a graduation photo of Monica, as a teaser for the story on Page 3: “25G Bail Holds Sturgis In Coercion of Ex-Spy.”

Henry Rothblatt, Sturgis’s other defense attorney, labeled Lorenz’s story “utter nonsense.” He said Lorenz had set Sturgis up by sending him the money to fly to New York from Miami. The allegations that Sturgis was the “man on the grassy knoll” in the Kennedy assassination “are absurd charges by a psychotic woman,” Rothblatt said. “Investigators have checked out his story and proved conclusively he was in Miami the day Kennedy was shot.”

In the corridor outside the courtroom after the Sturgis bail hearing, I stood with Detective Rosenthal, with whom I had worked for months. A gang of courthouse reporters was milling around near us, many of them regulars of the court but others there only because the defendant was a celebrity. Steve Dunleavy of the New York Post, one of Murdoch’s tab dogs, nosed me and Rosenthal out and tried to strike up a conversation. I didn’t know him from Adam, never met him and didn’t care to. I didn’t fancy the way he had tried to horn in on the Sam story. But there was a charm about him, nonetheless.

He nodded to me as though we’d worked together for years, called me by my first name and said, “Some story we have here, Tommy. What you got?”

Nice try, I thought. I shrugged off his overture and declined to converse.

Rosenthal and I got ourselves away from the pack. He stood with his back to one of the marble pillars in the corridor, near the door of a courtroom. Together we talked through what kind of beast we had here. Rosenthal was weary. He had been with Marita Lorenz earlier when she was meeting with members of the House staff. She had broken down in tears Rosenthal told me as she said that she had been in the car with Sturgis from Miami to New Orleans and then to Dallas and that there were others in the car with them. She told of how they

got to a hotel just a few days before Kennedy showed up in Dallas and how the people she was with were CIA-trained Castro killers. She said that they met people in Dallas and that she knew Oswald.

“She said Sturgis was the shooter on the grassy knoll,” Rosenthal said. “She was trembling, as scared as she could be, fighting tears.”

Listening to him—about the swirl of allegations, the mob connections in midtown, the gangland-CIA connection, the difficulties in getting to the bottom of the Manhattan rackets—the dreams associated with cultural heroes, virtue, honor and righteousness were all being turned upside down into mad chaos. At that point, on that early November night in the corridor outside the courtroom, I wondered if I had lost my mind.

“Maybe Lorenz is nuts. So what? I think it’s possible we got them squirming,” Rosenthal was saying, “and that the truth may be coming loose.”

How would we know, I was thinking, in such a wilderness of darkness?

“Tommy, I think we’re going to find out who killed the president.”

My cop pal Vinnie set me up to visit Lorenz and her attorney late the next afternoon in her apartment and go over the “proof” she supposedly had about Sturgis. I parked my car in special parking spaces on the Upper East Side where reporters with special New York police license plates are entitled to park. This little perk—police-approved parking at specially designated spots—was not only convenient in getting to and from assignments, it saved a \$10 parking tab every time out.

On the walk over to Lorenz’s apartment building at 89th and York, I passed a newsstand and saw Page 1 of the New York Post, the afternoon paper. There was a photo of Marita Lorenz aiming a pistol at the camera with two hands. The photographer had taken the shot somewhat off-angle to accentuate her shapely figure. Next to it was the headline: “I Can Be Very Dangerous.”

This was getting out of hand. A Page 1 shot like this? It turned out to be a Steve Dunleavy special, put up for shock effect. The story was a rundown of the Sturgis arrest and Lorenz’s allegations. But the photo? A staged shot solely for shock effect. Perfect Murdoch!

I went up to the apartment, where Vinnie introduced me to Lorenz, an attractive woman with big sprayed-up black hair, thick pancake makeup and wide black eyebrows applied with a wet brush. Her wiry-haired lawyer hovered nearby, supervising. Vinnie made the introductions. Among those in the modern high-rise flat was Monica, an attractive high-schooler with long hair and a pleasant smile. Her eyes darted around inspecting everyone as we were introduced. Concerned about her mother, she was sizing me up. I thought she seemed like a pretty normal kid. A younger brother, slight and not focused on the events, made an appearance on his way to do his homework. We retired to the kitchen table, where we sat nursing cups of coffee. I was there for a story, one I'd hoped would be an exclusive and would contain some evidence about Sturgis. But I was in a bad mood. I told the lawyer I had seen the Post.

"Yeah," he was saying. "They came by earlier today."

"What about the gun?"

"A prop. They brought it with them," the lawyer said. "It was the photographer's idea."

Vinnie knew my exclusive was gone. As for the proof? Lorenz took a few moments to outline her story. It was the same as I'd heard already, but I needed more than that. I was polite, but I had to have something to go on.

"Can you show me anything to back up your story?" I asked.

The lawyer clutched a copy of the paperback *Bikini Run*, written by Howard Hunt. He wanted to make more out of the name of the Hank Sturgis character than I did. I thought, so what? We already knew that Sturgis and Hunt knew each other.

"Do you have anything that gives some proof of what you've been saying about the car ride to Dallas, and Sturgis being the shooter?" I asked.

With this Lorenz stood up and said, "Come with me."

She led me from the kitchen over to a table on the other side of the room, where she had a stack of several large leather-bound three-ring binders. She took one and opened it up. The pages were filled with yellowing newspaper clippings of the Kennedy assassination, the Watergate break-in and assorted material that had been meticulously collected, mounted and copied. Some of the pages were traced copies

of other pages. The most ghoulish tracing was a rendering of the Kennedy autopsy, showing entry and exit wounds and the like.

“I want to show all this to the House Committee,” she was saying as she leafed through the binders.

After leafing through the books for some minutes, I realized that here was, at a minimum, an obsessive hobbyist over the edge. Proof? We were a long way from that. Vinnie saw that I wasn’t taking this too well.

“Tommy,” he was saying, as we went back to the kitchen table. “Mrs. Lorenz is talking with the House investigators, and it will be their job to corroborate what she says.”

Vinnie took me aside. “You got to help us play this out, Tommy,” he whispered. “Given what she knows about her boyfriend here in the city, she’s worth us working with.”

He was more accustomed to working with informants, so I gave him the benefit of the doubt in his world. But in mine, I needed to get a stronger sense of this “proof” than I had at that moment. When we were sitting down again, at the table I looked over my notebook and concentrated on what I’d taken down. There were so many holes, so many questions. Where should I begin?. Suddenly I looked up and realized I needed to start at the beginning—trusting the source.

“Ms. Lorenz,” I said, looking at her straight. “Is what you’re telling me the truth?”

Her eyes quickly welled up in tears. She threw her face into her hands and shook her head from side to side. Through her sobs and tears she said, “I’m not crazy, I just want the truth to come out.”

I looked to Vinnie, whose eyes were cold as ice. He didn’t like this any better than I did.. This broad was a manipulative, passive-aggressive whom I could not believe. At that moment, I knew that even if I’d ever had the Big One on the line, it had at that moment gotten away.

The next morning on Page 5, we had a story—“Bail Cut, Sturgis Loose Despite Her Story”—with a photo of Sturgis and his attorney leaving Rikers Island after he was released on \$10,000 bond. After my visit to Lorenz’s apartment, I had gone to Rikers for the press stakeout waiting for Sturgis’s release. My story ran through the tale once again: about

how Sturgis, 52, sat in silence in the back of a cab as his attorney Goldfarb said he was “innocent of all charges.” My piece regurgitated the previously published details that Sturgis had told the News six weeks earlier about the Operation 40 group, that Lorenz had told House committee investigators the previous weekend about her car ride leading up to the assassination and that on Tuesday, Nov. 1, Lorenz charged that Sturgis actually shot at Kennedy from the grassy knoll.

Eventually, G. Robert Blakey and the House committee staff listened to her entire story. Was it possible Lorenz was right and that Trafficante had sent a hit team of Latinos from Miami to Dallas?. Final congressional reports indicate Lorenz told the committee what she had told me: that she and Sturgis drove from Miami to Dallas via New Orleans with a group of anti-Castro Cubans and adventurers. The group arrived in Dallas Nov. 15 and were met by Jack Ruby at a motel.. Blakey later said he and the House Assassinations Committee rejected Lorenz’s story. Sturgis and everyone involved in her tale denied the story emphatically, Blakey said. He also said that Lorenz’s story was weakened by her statement that the group she traveled with was met by Jack Ruby. Too fantastic, he said.

After a two-year investigation, the House committee concluded in 1979 that JFK was “probably assassinated as the result of a conspiracy.” The committee said “considerable evidence” existed showing that Ruby had met Marcello’s pal Trafficante and that the New Orleans and Tampa crime bosses “most likely” were behind the conspiracy. But it had no hard evidence, and no charges would result.

Committee counsel Blakey, by now a law professor at the University of Notre Dame, said he believed a second gunman was on the grassy knoll. “We figure there was a second gunman, and if so there was a conspiracy,” Blakey told reporters. “Proving who it was is another matter.”

Whatever the fate of the mystery behind President Kennedy’s murder, federal organized crime prosecutors never let up on Marcello. In 1981, Marcello was convicted in federal court of conspiracy to bribe a federal judge and sentenced to seven years. A second conviction in 1982 and a second seven-year sentence for racketeering were voided by the Supreme Court when it invalidated the mail fraud statute under which he had been convicted. Marcello, in failing health, was released

from prison in 1989 and returned to his home in Metairie outside New Orleans, where he died four years later at age 83.

Looking back on it, the Frank Sturgis-Marita Lorenz tit-for-tat amounted to no more than a farcical sideshow in one of the longest running news stories of our day. After all, the murder of a president of the United States is a Big One, and in my life time answering the lingering questions about the murder of this particular President, the Big One. As a reporter, taking a run at it was worth the quest.

But in the desire to get Page 1, I had learned too much about my craft and myself to be much use anymore. I kept my spirit for the craft, but the fire had dimmed. I realized that what I was doing was not much better than a hunt for fame. Despite the good this kind of reporting can realize, plenty could go wrong too. Each time out, as I sought a story for Page 1, I bumped up against the limits of that kind of journalism and that kind of news coverage.

Once, during a slow news day when editors were debating the relative importance of a series of very unimportant stories, a veteran reporter told me: “Today’s the kind of news day that makes for trouble tomorrow morning.”

“How so?”

He held up a front page and pointed to the large letters in the headline. “See these letters? That’s 120-point type. We’re stuck with them. And tomorrow headlines this large are going to scream at the readers: ‘Hey, nothing happened yesterday.’ ”

There are also other forces at work: your prejudices, preconceptions, and ambitions, even your humanity. Then there are the limits of words and form; and the long tested restraints of fairness and balance—the formula that requires the reporter to answer in each story the questions: who, what, when, where and why. There are also facts you don’t know and that can’t be proven or ever established. There is no evidence left behind. There are secrets and their guardians that prevent them from being known and who will lie to protect them. Then there are your own needs to maintain enough stability in your life that you can sleep at night and provide for your family.

But then again, sometimes a story has to be told anyway—despite

the limits and despite the errors and despite the vanity and secrets. In the case of this particular story, leaving behind yellowed newsprint of stories that printed only a portion of the truth would be not be good enough. Because in the hall of that Manhattan courthouse that winter night, I believed in fact we were getting to the truth behind who killed the president. Only I'd have to rely on the imperfect craft of a NewsWalker to tell it.