

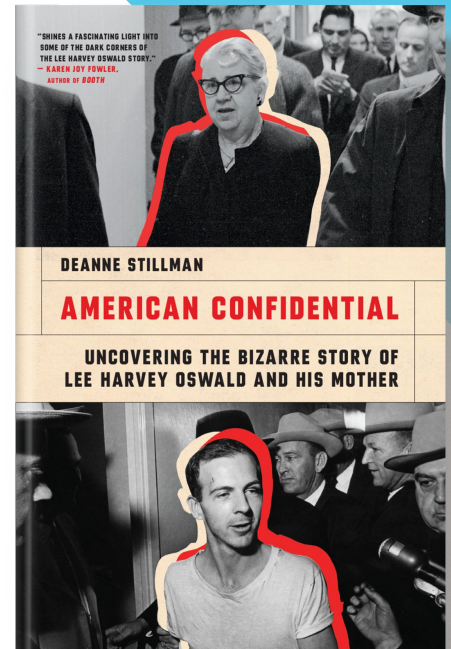
AMERICAN CONFIDENTIAL

Uncovering The Bizarre Story of Lee Harvey Oswald And His Mother

Deanne Stillman

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“Deanne Stillman’s *American Confidential* takes the familiar and makes it new—makes it thrilling. You won’t believe this story; it resonates with deep American echoes.”

— **Darin Strauss**, author of *Chang & Eng*

“It takes a master writer to wring out any sympathy from JFK’s killer, yet Deanne Stillman has done this without losing sight of the monster before us.” —**Gustavo Arellano**, columnist, *Los Angeles Times*

NOTE TO THE READER

In the tradition of Joan Didion and Charles Bowden, on the 60th anniversary of the JFK assassination, critically acclaimed writer Deanne Stillman presents an astonishing new account of one of the 20th century’s most notorious assassins, Lee Harvey Oswald—and the mother who raised him . . .

American Confidential is a mother-son noir tale that plays out across the Wild West of mid-twentieth century America, delving into Oswald’s nomadic boyhood, and the world of his restless and disillusioned mother, who passed along a legacy of class resentment and a clamorous need to matter.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Lee Harvey Oswald’s mother Marguerite was obsessed with fame and recognition and passed on her beliefs to her son. How do our own family dynamics play out in other relationships? How often do we do something to please a particular parent, even if we’re not aware of our behavior? Are we creatures of our upbringing or can we shake the bonds of the past?
2. Marguerite Oswald felt that her family was trapped in the working class, and much of her need to matter had to do with her resentment of the middle and upper class. Has growing up in a certain circumstance impacted your life? Do you think that people are still stranded in a certain “class”? What are ways to break out of class designations?
3. In *American Confidential*, it is suggested that our names shape us. Lee Harvey Oswald was named after the Confederate general Robert E. Lee, a fact he was immensely proud of. In what ways did being a son of the south shape his behavior? Does your own name symbolize anything to you and your family and how has it influenced you?
4. How has the myth of the “Wild West” affected your perceptions and views of American life?

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5. Since Oswald killed JFK and posed for the infamous Polaroid with his rifle, many troubled young men have emerged with their guns, presenting as mass shooters, often expressing adulation for Lee Harvey Oswald. How do certain images in American life influence society?
6. A new book about the JFK assassination by a former Secret Service agent who witnessed the tragic incident suggests, possibly, that Oswald didn't act alone. Yet many factors continue to point to Oswald as the lone killer. What do you think happened?
7. *American Confidential* tells the story of Ruth Paine, a woman who invited Oswald's wife Marina to move in with her during a time of trouble in the Oswalds' marriage. Ruth, a Quaker, felt compelled to offer sanctuary to Marina. Later, it turned out that Lee had been storing the rifle he used to kill JFK in the Paines' garage. Have you ever helped anyone out, learning later that your act had consequences you never expected? (Good and bad?).
8. Lee's older brother Robert said after the assassination of JFK that he felt there was a critical moment where teenaged Lee was offered help and his mother declined. Had she taken psychiatrists up on their recommendation, Lee might have followed a different course. Can you point to a crossroad in your own life or the lives of anyone you know in which a pivotal decision was made? How did it change things?
9. What causes someone to "snap"? Or is there any one thing? How do mental disorders figure into the equation? Is there such a thing as a bad seed? And what can happen when a gun is thrown into the mix?
10. While living in the Bronx with his mother when he was a teenager, Oswald used to visit the Bronx Zoo as an escape from family turmoil. His mother and brother later told investigators that he loved animals. What animals do you turn to for comfort and solace? Do you think that spending time with animals can save us?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deanne Stillman is a widely published, acclaimed writer. Her books of literary nonfiction include *Blood Brothers*; *Desert Reckoning*; *Mustang* (an LA Times "best book of the year," silver medalist for the California Book Award, starred review in Publishers Weekly), and *Twentynine Palms* (an LA Times "best book of the year" which Hunter Thompson called "A strange and brilliant story by an important American writer").

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