INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR BARRY ERNEST
'THE GIRL ON THE STAIRS:
The Search for a Missing Witness to the JFK Assassination'

A silent witness is heard at last. It required 35 years of painstakingly diligent searching to uncover Victoria Adams, a key witness to the JFK assassination, and her story. Adams was on the staircase of the Texas School Book Depository at the precise moment that Lee Harvey Oswald, according to the Warren Commission, was making his escape—and yet she saw no one. Badgered by the Commission and fearing for her life, Adams vanished into obscurity. At long last, her story has been brought to light and forces us to reconsider one of the most controversial assassinations of the 20th century.
About the Author

Barry Ernest is an author and former investigative journalist. He served in the US Navy as a radar man aboard the aircraft carrier USS Franklin D. Roosevelt. Following his time in the service, he graduated from Point Park University in Pittsburgh. Ernest worked as a staff writer for the York (PA) Sunday News and the Syracuse (NY) Herald-Journal and Sunday Herald-American. He is a former press secretary and director of communications for the state of Pennsylvania. Passionate about finding the truth in the assassination of Pres. John F. Kennedy, Ernest began his search for Victoria Adams in 1967. He frequently lectures on the topic and is the recipient of the 2011 Mary Ferrell Pioneer Award, a national honor presented for a lifetime of searching for the truth in the event that changed our country forever. Ernest resides with his wife in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

The Interview:

1. Can you tell those who may not know who Vicki Adams was a bit about her history and her relation to the JFK case? And also about her time as a nun?

Vicki was born in San Francisco. At the age of 11, she became a ward of the State of California after her parents abandoned her, something that would haunt her for the rest of her life. She was shuffled between several foster homes until she graduated in 1958 from Presentation High School, an all-girls' Catholic institution. She then entered the Novitiate at St. Martin, Ohio, in the Ursuline Order, studying to become a nun. She had gone to boarding school there at the age of 10 and considered the environment to be somewhat stable and orderly, characteristics she was desperately seeking. Two years later she moved to Atlanta, where she taught a sixth-grade class at the Immaculate Heart of Mary school. When the academic year ended in 1962, she was off again, this time to Dallas for another job as a sixth-grade teacher at St. Monica’s school. In mid-1963, the Scott Foresman Co., with local offices on the fourth-floor of the Texas School Book Depository, was looking to expand their school textbook sales into the Catholic school system in the southwest. Vicki applied for the position and was hired. It was from the windows of her new workplace that she observed the assassination below. Moments after the final shot, she ran from the fourth floor and descended the back stairs of the Depository to get outside and see what had happened. According to the Warren Report, her actions would have put her on those stairs at the same time Lee Oswald was coming down them from the sixth floor "sniper’s nest." But because she testified that she had seen and heard no one on those stairs, Vicki was labeled as having been mistaken with her timing, and dismissed.

3 Photographs of Vicki
2. On November 22, 1963 there seem to be some witnesses to corroborate Ms. Adams testimony. Can you please tell us about that?

The Warren Report gives the impression that Miss Adams made her trip down the back stairs alone. It fails to mention, however, that a co-worker by the name of Sandra Styles accompanied Vicki and could have provided corroboration as to the timing of their descent. This fact is not revealed unless one makes the effort to read the testimony of Miss Adams in the 26 volumes. In addition, Miss Adams’ supervisor, Dorothy Garner, actually followed Vicki and Sandra out the rear of the office and watched as they entered the staircase. So we have two additional witnesses who could have attested to what Vicki was saying. Sandra Styles was never questioned by the Warren Commission. And a document citing Dorothy Garner in which we find confirmation of Vicki’s accuracy was suppressed until 1999. Dorothy Garner, by the way, was not officially questioned by the Warren Commission, but she told me in an exclusive interview in 2011 that “someone” from the Commission had indeed talked with her “briefly” about this incident. No record or transcript of that interview can be found.

3. Can you describe the actions of Roy Truly and Marrion Baker in the Book Depository at the time of JFK’s murder, and how you interviewed them?

When the shots were fired, Dallas Police Officer Marrion Baker, riding a motorcycle in the motorcade, noticed pigeons flying from the roof of the Depository. He ran into the building with intentions of getting to the roof and was met by TSBD supervisor Roy Truly. Both then proceeded up the rear staircase. On the second floor, Baker noticed a man entering the second of two doorways leading to a lunchroom and went to confront him. When Truly told the officer this man was an employee, Baker hoisted his drawn gun and both he and Truly continued up the stairs. The lunchroom man turned out to be Oswald, who then left the building by way of the front door. I talked with Truly in 1968, who repeated his statements that Oswald was calm, cool and collected during his encounter with Baker. Truly told me Oswald did not present the appearance of one who had just shot the president of the United States. Unfortunately, Truly denied my request for access to the sixth floor. But he did allow me to roam around on the first floor and, when no one was looking, I climbed the back stairs to look around in the lunchroom and the surrounding area. I was fortunate to get a rare telephone interview with Marrion Baker in 2004, who provided details that also corroborated what Vicki Adams had been saying concerning the timing of her descent.

4. What do you feel may have been the motivation for the Warren Commission to cover up guilt in the case? And can you speak a bit about witnesses who say that their testimony was altered?

5. In my opinion, the cover up was the result of who the Warren Commission believed was involved in a conspiracy to kill John Kennedy. Several witnesses I interviewed, including Roger Craig and Victoria Adams, told me their testimony had been changed from what they initially said versus what ended up being printed in the 26 volumes. Since my focus was on Vicki, I studied extensively her official statements and discovered only recently that the Warren Commission testimony now exist, one declassified in 1967 and a second declassified in 2011, coincidentally two months after The Girl on the Stairs was published. Vicki always told me her testimony as it appears in the 26 volumes includes comments attributed to her that she did not say and, according to her, appeared to have been inserted with the express purpose of making her appear wrong. In order to determine if this was the case, I filed a FOIA request with the National Archives to examine the original stenographer’s notes of Vicki’s testimony LB not a transcript but the actual words taken down by the court reporter who was present as Vicki was being questioned. I knew the Archives had these documents for they are listed in the inventory of JFK records under “Entry 39: Stenotype Notes of Proceedings, January 21-September 15, 1964.” Vicki had been questioned on April 7, 1964. Several weeks after my request, I was informed the notes regarding Vicki’s testimony were missing.

6. Can you please tell us a bit about the contents of your interview with Roger Craig as related to 11/22/63?

Roger Craig was a decorated Dallas deputy sheriff in 1963. Thanks to Penn Jones, I was able to get a lengthy taped interview with him in 1969. He was soft spoken and appeared to be credible, if a bit paranoid. The latter detail was based on his actions when he picked me up at my hotel and he conducted cat-and-mouse maneuvers on his way to his sister’s home outside Dallas. But as the afternoon progressed and I experienced first-hand an attempt by the Dallas police to intimidate him, I understood why he felt that way. During our interview he repeated what he had been saying up to that point: that he had seen a man he later identified as Lee Oswald run from the area of the Depository shortly after the assassination and got into a passing station wagon; that the rifle found on the sixth floor was a 7.65 German Mauser; that the ‘sniper’s nest’ appeared to have been staged; that the paper bag used to transport the rifle was NOT present at the window; and that the three cartridge cases found near the sixth-floor window did not appear to have been recently fired.

7. What evidence places Lee Harvey Oswald in the lunchroom at the time of the murder of President Kennedy?

There is no evidence that definitively places Oswald in the second-floor lunchroom as the shots were being fired. If you believe what Oswald quoted as telling police during his interrogation sessions (12 hours that went unrecorded and without a stenographer being present), he was eating his lunch in the first-floor dining room when the shots occurred, and then went to the second floor to purchase a drink. This is perhaps why Vicki Adams did not see him on the stairs, why he was so calm during the lunchroom confrontation, and why Baker first described Oswald as entering the lunchroom from a direction other than the back staircase. Certainly Vicki Adams saying she was on the stairs during this critical period presented an obvious problem to the Warren Commission’s scenario, which might explain why she was the only person excluded from time tests regarding Oswald’s escape, and why corroborating witnesses to her story were ignored.
8. How did you finally locate Ms. Adams, and what was her reaction to your overtures to offer her a platform to speak about these events?

In her testimony before the Warren Commission, Vicki said she graduated from high school in San Francisco. That little tidbit is eventually what led me to finding her, albeit some 35 years later. Once I purchased a computer to write my book, I used this new technology to conduct an online search through the alumni pages of every high school in the San Francisco Bay area, starting alphabetically with the letter "A." When I finally reached Presentation High School, I came across a Victoria Adams in a graduating class of 1959. The name, of course, fit. So did the year. But several inquiries to the school resulted in no replies. A friend of mine I½ well call him Larry Roberge I½ was a Pennsylvania State Police investigator who was also very adept with a computer. He offered to help. Within a week he had ferreted out Vicki's email address and had written her a note, saying that he was a former classmate of hers at Presentation and was wondering if she was the Victoria Adams who had once worked in Dallas for the Scott Foresman Company. When Vicki replied yes, she was indeed that woman, he turned the matter over to me and the rest is my history. Vicki would later tell me she was very curious about his reference to once being a classmate of hers, since Presentation was an all-girls' school. Vicki was at first hesitant to talk about her past, not really knowing much about me. I had to do some work to convince her that I was legitimate. She would later say the fact I was so persistent in my efforts to determine her side of the story was what eventually made her trust me and feel comfortable about discussing it.

9. Can you describe a bit your relationship to researcher Harold Weisberg, and what kind of a man that you knew him to be?

I had read Harold's Whitewash series by the time I stumbled across him one morning as he sat in the National Archives. I was new to this mess then and, for some reason, he took me under his wing. Many have since said that my current beliefs on this subject were influenced solely by Harold's conclusions that a government coverup had occurred. That is simply not true. My current beliefs have been influenced by an objective and thorough approach to examining the existing evidence, a lesson in research methods taught to me by Harold. He would often call me up or discuss in person various research projects I½ what he called "assignments" I½ that he wanted me to work on. I was flattered by the opportunities, even though his "assignments" often got me followed, my phone tapped, and my mail opened. As it turned out, his final "assignment" for me was to write The Girl on the Stairs.

10. What changes in policy do you think those responsible for JFK's death might have been trying to force?

Now here you have hit upon the key to it. What was happening before his death and what occurred after? Kennedy's efforts toward peace and an easing of world tensions were not popular policies back then.

11. Were any witnesses in the JFK case that you came across intimidated, or possibly murdered?

I can think of three who I knew. Roger Craig was clearly nervous about coming into Dallas that day for our interview. Carroll Jarnagin was even worse during the two times I talked with him. Jarnagin was a Dallas attorney who claimed he saw Oswald and Ruby together in Ruby's nightclub. He told me someone tried to asphyxiate him as he slept in his home one night. Then there is Victoria Adams, who said a Dallas Police investigator appeared on her doorstep one night under circumstances that suggested she had been followed to that address. When she asked the officer why she was being questioned again since she had already provided a statement to the Dallas Police, he told her that her file had been burned in a fire at police headquarters. This, of course, did not happen.

12. Can you speak a little about the murder of Officer Tippit, and how that seems to fit into the overall case.

In my opinion, the murder of Officer J. D. Tippit has not been completely resolved. There are just too many unanswered questions here. We have the official version, of course. But that contains a lot of evidentiary holes and contradictions. Then, for instance, you have statements by Mrs. Donald Higgins, who I interviewed, who said the Tippit murder occurred at 1:06 pm, certainly much earlier than the 1:16 pm time proposed by the Commission. That earlier time would preclude Oswald from having committed it, unless he arrived there by some other means. Mrs. Higgins was never officially questioned about any of this (do you see the pattern here?). If it were only her providing this earlier time, one could easily say she was mistaken. But the circumstances surrounding how she arrived at that time are very credible, she had no reason to lie, and other witnesses (including one the Commission used to say Oswald did it) have supported an earlier time to Tippit's murder as well.

13. Lee Harvey Oswald was labeled as a loner, and malcontent. From what you have learned of him, can you describe a bit about who he seemed to have actually been?

He was definitely an odd fellow. But he was also smart, capable, for instance, of beating others more advanced than he was at chess and, if you believe the official record, able to teach himself Russian, one of the most challenging languages to learn, especially on your own. He liked the opera and was a vociferous reader, knowledgeable in a lot of subjects. His actions in both his military and civilian lives seem consistent with someone having a far deeper complexity than what we have been told. Oh, and he was also a rather poor shot!

14. Can you please tell us about the latest edition of your book?

The Girl on the Stairs was initially self-published. I had several literary agents early on in the game who offered it to numerous commercial publishers. Those publishers either weren't interested, or wanted me to write a
concluding chapter speculating as to how the assassination went down and who I thought did it. Since the whole point of my book was a search for truth and for the woman who ultimately possessed it, I refused to conclude it with nothing more than conjecture. Harold Weissberg had taught me well. “But it’s for entertainment,” one publisher commented. I was not convinced. My final literary agent suggested I self-publish and perhaps if I could sell near 10,000 books on my own, it might catch the eye of a commercial publisher. To my amazement, the book sold 15,000 copies in one year. Pelican Publishing in New Orleans became interested and, with updated research and a better editorial eye from their end, it became more widely available last year. The truth behind Victoria Adams is finally becoming known. And that was the point of all of this.

15. Your research seems to have led Ms. Adams to at least some closure and validation. As you look back on these experiences and all of your research, what do you come away with in your feelings of Ms. Adams and this aspect of the case?

Miss Adams has been dismissed for simply doing what we are all taught to do: tell the truth. Honesty and truthfulness were core values to her, characteristics gained through her religious upbringing and clearly evident when one got to know her. The instability of her early life and her later treatment by a government she once believed in led to constant feelings of fear on her part. Although she passed away before The Girl on the Stairs was published, she knew the direction the book was taking. She once told me she was all she ever wished for out of this was for people to know that she had told the truth. I can only hope that she was finally able to come to terms with this part of her life and realize that her wish was going to come true, no matter how long it took.

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The Blog

New evidence shows how the CIA with the help of the Secret Service altered the original Zapruder film and kept it out of circulation for years to make sure the public didn't catch on to the fact that Lee Harvey Oswald did not kill President John F. Kennedy. See the video CLICK HERE

The release of new JFK files and files related to the MLK assassination in 2017 have done nothing to dissuade the evidence as to the innocence of Lee Harvey Oswald and James Earl Ray. The cumulative value of all the newly released files simply support all of the findings I have established as a result of my investigation in 1977.

More on how the CIA kept it’s secrets, even during the House Select Committee on Assassinations ... CLICK HERE

Don’t Stop Dancing

Based on the Investigation of the Life/Music/Career of Michael Jackson
Neverland
More about the movie, Don’t Stop Dancing CLICK HERE.