

SARA JANE MOORE SHOT AT PRESIDENT FORD "How in two years did I change from a relatively normal middle aged suburbanite to a would be assassin?"

This is a question from a seven page statement by Sarah Jane Moore in 1975. When I ask around to see if anyone remembered who she was, I got mixed responses. My children were sure Sarah Jane was a cookie like Mrs. Fields. Someone said she was an F.B.I. agent.

Some never heard of her and most people remember her as the woman who tried to knock off President Ford. And she was an agent and she did try to shoot Ford with a hand gun.

I was given this statement by Kady van Deurs who had been in prison with Sarah Jane. Kady was in prison for demonstrating against war and nuclear proliferation. Her father was George van Deurs, who after a distinguished career in Naval aviation had retired from the US Navy in 1951 as a Rear Admiral. I think Kady met Sarah during her third offence demonstrating against everything military.

Sarah was often referred to as a poor demented woman. Here is a portion of what she wrote about that period of her life.

"The impression is being deliberately fostered that I am a poor demented woman who went off her rocker and in a moment of madness fired a shot at Gerald Ford. The success of the F.B.I. is people like me...for whom the American dream has worked (then) we find out that for a majority of Americans it is not only a myth but that our very comfort and success is dependent on the oppression and repression even the blood of others...Gerald Ford's life is no more valuable than...an American soldier killed in Vietnam...when any government uses assassination...it must expect that tool to be turned back against it.

"I am not...insane...well qualified psychiatrists who examined me...agreed I was under pressure and my judgment was "somewhat impaired".

"My attorney...urged my complete and honest cooperation with both the defense and prosecution psychiatrists. I agreed since (I did not want) to spend the rest of my life in prison...No one has been charged with, nor is on trial for the assassination plots against Castro, Allende, or other foreign leaders.

"I did indeed willfully and knowingly attempt to murder Gerald R. Ford, the president of the United States, by use of a handgun...I have spent time...seriously considering...the rights I waive with a guilty plea and the consequences of that plea. (She allowed time to reconsider her plea of guilty.)

"I looked at my sister prisoners and wondered if this opportunity to review my plea and consider the consequences would have been offered if my skin was black or my name (was latina) instead of Moore...I thought about all the money sent by the government to have doctors flown in from

all over the country to examine me at length and contrasted that with the struggle of the other women at County Jail simply to get to see a psychiatric nurse.

"I am as frightened as I have ever been in my entire life, but I am at peace with myself, (with the plea of guilty)." In answer to questions asked by a probation officer, Sarah had this to say:

"Would I counsel anyone else to attempt such an assassination? No.

"Do I think assassination a valid political tool? Yes, (but) it has been more often and most effectively used against rather than by progressive forces.

"Am I sorry I tried? yes and no. "Yes because it accomplished little except to throw away the rest of my life...No, because at the time it seems a correct expression of my anger and, if successful, the assassination combined with the public disclosures of this government's own activities in this area just might have triggered the kind of chaos that could have started the upheaval of change.

"How in two years did I change from a relatively normal middle aged suburbanite to a would be assassin? ...I think I was relatively normal. Many of the people around me were almost as dissatisfied as I with the system and were also looking for answers. They worked in the same causes as I...In the peace movement...the farm workers...the Black Panther Party then trying to bring good medical care to the people by establishing free medical clinics...new awareness of the prison system.

"...the kidnapping of Patty Hearst brought me...to the attention of the F.B.I. as I met and began to work again with those I had briefly met or hear about during those fashionable liberal do gooder actions of a few years before.

"But, this time I was faced with the reality, the very raw truth, of those things only spoken about before. Instead of polite and articulate (people) I met the people they spoke of the angry; no, the enraged black and brown people we oppress and close out of our system.

"The FBI directed me to people and organizations seriously working for radical change whose dreams I found I shared whose dedication I envied and whose goal socialism seemed not only necessary but possible.

"My natural inclination was toward the theorists, mostly well educated white people like myself who studied and wrote but eschewed violent action.

"But the original reason the FBI recruited me was the search for Patty Hearst and the SLA so I stayed very much interested in and active among the angry and dispossessed the theorist only talked about.

"So there was working on me this combination of theory which made understandable a possible and powerful dream and exposure to those who found their only recourse in violence.

"There was no coordination not even any communication between these groups. the whole left as a matter of fact seemed disorganized, strife ridden and weak. And I realized the reason for this

was the FBI whose tool I was who clearly and correctly saw the strength and power of the idea of socialism realized it represented a very real danger to our profit motivated corporate state and who had declared a total, though secret, war against not only dedicated revolutionaries but also against all progressive forces even those working for the most acceptable "American" changes such as civil rights because they threatened the established order.

"I listened with horror once to a bright young agent as he bragged about his abilities in the area of anonymous letter writing and other forms of character assassination, not of big important leaders; but of little people as soon as they showed any leadership potential, the Bureau's tactic is to cut them down or burn them out before they realize their potential.

"I remember Worthington (my Bureau control) saying: "you don't seem to realize that this is war!" he thought the next two or three years would be the most crucial in our nation's history. His greatest fear at that time was that the left would rediscover the documents and ideas from the first and second American revolutions and use them to spark a new revolution.

"He said that these words are as powerful today as ever and that properly used (actually he said "cleverly" used) the people could be aroused by these ideas and would fight again to achieve them.

"Why is socialism so compelling an idea? Well, compare China and India thirty years ago similarly oppressed, famine ridden; the people illiterate, the leaders corrupt.

"Both threw off foreign yokes...Today India is still corrupt her people oppressed, poverty stricken, famine ridden, jobless and ill housed while China's 800 million are healthy, literate, well housed and fed, and appear to be happy.

"That explains my political beliefs. It does not explain why in the name of a dream whose essence is a deep love for people and a belief in the essential beauty and worth of each individual I picked up a gun intending to kill another human being.

"When I was getting ready to go public regarding my spying activities a journalist attempting to verify some facts was told by the FBI that if the story appeared I would be in danger.

"This warning was repeated to me by the FBI with the additional suggestion that I should leave town. Charles Bates told me that of course they couldn't stop me from talking but that I was placing myself in danger if the story appeared. He stated that at any rate he was not going to allow the FBI to be embarrassed. If there was anything they didn't like in the story they would simply see that it was edited out, that they had done that before, that he had "friends" on that particular paper somewhat higher up than the reporter level.

"I had already had a phone call saying I was next that was just after the murder of a friend. Now friends and foes alike vied with each other to warn me each claiming to have heard from sources they refused to name that I was to be "offed" or at the very least beaten.

"Beyond a certain point pressure and threats are counter-productive. When one is threatened to a point where one is convinced; that is, when I finally accepted the fact that I was not going to be able to get away--that I wasn't willing to pay the price--the realization I would probably be killed ceased to frighten--it brought instead a sense of freedom.

"The fear of arrest similarly disappeared. It wasn't "if" but only "when"--again the sense of freedom. First I was trashed and discredited and made to seem like a "kook"--with the help of the ever-cooperative press. Then I had a well-publicized trial. I was neutralized and told I could receive a lesser sentence if I would cooperate with the courts. Tell them who else shares my ideals and they would go easy on me.

"I have no desire or reason to cooperate with a government to whose destruction I am dedicated. However torturous the path--however many mistakes are made--however weak we may be as individuals; somehow--somewhere along the way someone will finally spark the prairie fire of a new revolution in America. A revolution that will change the government from one of the politicians, by the docile puppets, for the corporate interests to a "government of the people, by the people, for the people."

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"When there was no longer any chance of being accepted by those people doing (what I felt was) positive constructive work toward radical change I finally understood and joined those who have only destruction and violence as a means of making change and came to understand that violence can sometimes be constructive. "Patty Hearst had a machine gun that she shot holes in a building with while robbing a store. Her presents in the media shook up and mock the rich. She is now 'just a plain old housewife' ---"

Sara Jane Moore, 77, was released in the morning from the federal women's prison in Dublin, outside San Francisco, according to Mike Truman of the Bureau of Prisons.

1. There was no immediate comment from the prison facility, where Moore had been Inmate No. 04851180. Officials said she had a recent parole hearing, but they did not know what prompted her release.

Nor was it clear what her plans are or where she is headed.

The former nurse and mother of five had been trying for 20 years to gain her freedom.

Moore was arrested in September 22, 1975, outside the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco after firing a single shot at Ford. A bystander had grabbed Moore's arms just before she fired a .38 caliber revolver and was credited with probably saving the president's life. The bullet missed Ford's head by inches.

Seventeen days earlier Ford survived another attempt on his life by Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, a follower of Charles Manson, in Sacramento, California.

Moore pleaded guilty to attempted assassination and was sentenced to life in prison. At the time she had been married and divorced seven times.

In recent interviews Moore said she regretted her actions, which she said were motivated by radical revolutionary politics.

As an inmate she worked as an accountant in the prison drapery factory.

Ford died December 26, 2006, from natural causes.