Lenny Bruce once told me how all the night club comics used to gossip about Jack Ruby's "tattoo of a lady's schnozzle (translate: pussy) in his armpit." If it wasn't a fact, I'm quite willing to settle for an apocryphal allusion which nevertheless crystallized the entire personality of that alleged murderer who wanted so very much to be liked.

I say alleged because upon Ruby's own death, Dallas District Attorney Henry Wade said he would dismiss the murder charge against him, a promise which has since been kept, although no such posthumous grace was ever officially bestowed on Lee Harvey Oswald. See, they grant you retrospective innocence only in the face of innumerable witnesses who were present at the actual event through the miracle of inadvertent televised coverage.

Jack Leon Rubenstein was born in Chicago in 1911, the fourth of eight children. His father was a carpenter who basked in the remembered adventures of the time he was in the Russian Army — into which he had been drafted, and from which he had deserted. Jack, a scrapper, was his "little Cossack."

Brought up in the slums, the Rubenstein kids made their own toys out of old roller skates and discarded baby buggies; balls were fashioned out of hundreds of scavenged rubberbands. Jack and his sister Ev bought shopping bags for two and a half cents each and sold them for a dime.

The parents separated, and the court sent the children away to foster homes. Jack stayed on a farm for two unhappy years. Then his mother sent for the kids. At Chicago Stadium they'd ask people for extra tickets — the youngest boy, Earl, was dressed as a ragamuffin to elicit maximum sympathy — and then they'd sell the tickets at 100 percent profit.

While he was in his early twenties, Jack's mother had a breakdown and was committed for insanity to a hospital where she stayed for a year. At twenty-six, in San Francisco, he fell in love with a girl named Virginia but she was out of his class. She came from a wealthy family, and he was a newspaper subscription salesman helping to support his sister and her son. He chicked out and returned to Chicago. Alone.

His depression coincided with the nation's.

In Chicago, over lunch with an old friend, attorney Leon Cooke, he decided to organize a scrap iron and junk handlers union. Cooke's family had become rich from their junk yards and he felt the scrap handlers were getting rooked. They were making ten to fifteen cents an hour.

Labor columnist Victor Riesel wrote: "Ruby played it straight. He did not have his hand out. He did not reach for a shake. He had no close connection with organized crime — at a time when the syndicate was deep in everything from food to movies."

The Warren Commission states: "There is no evidence that Ruby's union activities were connected with Chicago's criminal element. Several longtime members of the union reported that it had a good reputation when Ruby was affiliated with it and employers who negotiated with it have given no indication that it had criminal connections."

But within a few months after the union got started, Leon Cooke had an argument with its president, John Martin. The two of them were alone in the office. Shots were fired. Ruby insisted that Leon was shot in the back; Riesel reported that he "got it in the chest." Either way, he died less than a month later. Martin was freed in a local court on the grounds of self-defense.

Jack adopted Cooke's first name as his own middle name. That's where the Leon came from. He left the union, which proceeded to become corrupt. Almost two decades later, the AFL-CIO investigated it, put it under trusteeship and suspended the man who'd taken Ruby's place.

Ruby went into the illegal punchboard (take-a-chance) business, got drafted, became an Air Force mechanic, went into the manufacturing business (salt and pepper shakers) with his brother, managed a twelve-year-old Negro boy dancer named Sugar Daddy, and was finally persuaded by his sister Ev to come manage her nightclub in Dallas.

And we all know what happened then.

Part of it might never have happened if Jack had married Virginia in San Francisco or if Leon hadn't been killed in Chicago or if Sugar Daddy didn't have two mothers who both claimed his trust fund, but that's show business.

To his death, Ruby swore that he never knew Lee Harvey Oswald, that he wasn't employed by anyone to silence him, that no one helped him do it, nor knew that he was going to do it — including himself — and he also denied accusations of being or ever having been: a Communist, a fellow traveler, a Communist sympathizer, a member of any Communist or subversive organization, a member of the extreme right wing, a supporter of any extremist philosophy, a gangster, a racketeer, a hoodlum, an underworld character, a white slaver, a pimp, a homosexual, a sex deviate, a narcotics user.

In that order.

On the evening of the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Jack Ruby received a telephone call from Little Linn, a stripper from Fort Worth who worked at his
club and didn’t realize that he would be closed that night out of respect to the dead President.

On the morning of the scheduled transfer of Oswald from City Hall to the Dallas County Jail, Little Linn called Ruby again. She needed some money to help pay her rent. He promised to wire it to her.

Four minutes before he shot Lee Harvey Oswald to death, Jack Ruby was in the Western Union office. There was one person in line before him. He waited his turn and sent Little Linn $25.

I have a photocopy of that telegram. The time stamp says 11:17 a.m. Oswald was supposed to have been moved at 10 o’clock.

But there was still a crowd at City Hall, a block-and-a-half away from the telegraph office. Ruby walked over there in order to satisfy his curiosity and he ended up giving birth to Mark Lane.

And now Jack Ruby is dead himself, a man whose greatest ambition in life was to be the sheriff of Dallas.

On February 11, Schiller—a former production company, Atsko, Inc., has gone from photo-journalism to audio-journalism—was busy preparing a series of interviews for a long-playing documentary album about the assassination and its aftermath for Capitol Records. Two-and-a-half weeks before Ruby’s death, Schiller placed tape equipment inside a briefcase and stayed in an automobile outside while Earl Ruby and Elmer Gertz, Jack’s Chicago attorney, went into the hospital.

A guard, stationed twenty-four hours a day in Jack Ruby’s room, stood only a few feet away, unaware that the conversation was being recorded. Earl, no longer the ragamuffin, spoke to Jack in Yiddish: “Talk into the—here, the device mechanical is in here, talk into the case.”

And the dialogue began. It lasted for 14 minutes. On the record, the section with Jack Ruby is edited down to only 3 minutes and 55 seconds.

When Ruby died, Capitol Records pre-released the album that very day in a burst of exploitation. I happened to be in Los Angeles at the time and attended the press conference where Alan Livingston, president of Capitol, asserted that the original recording had been placed by him in a bank vault but would be available only to government officials upon request.

I stopped in Chicago on my way back to New York and spoke to Elmer Gertz. He couldn’t understand why Livingston was being so mysterious. He admitted that he was surprised at the lack of security procedures in Dallas; he had been thoroughly searched many years before when he’d gone to Cook County jail for his infamous client, Nathan Leopold.

Eventually I was able to obtain a transcript of the entire interview. Rather than reveal evidence of any conspiracy, it only serves to strengthen the coincidental role that I believe Ruby played.

First, here is an excerpt from the recorded interview:

**Question:** Normally you carried the gun with you, didn’t you, Jack?

**Answer:** Yes I did. I always carried a gun because of various alterations I had in my club. And I carried pretty large sums of money at times. The ironclad part of this is that if I hadn’t made an illegal turn behind the bus to the parking lot, had I gone to the Western Union the way I was supposed to—straight down Main Street—I’d have never met this fate. Because the difference in meeting this fate was 30 seconds. One way or the other...

**Question:** Okay, from the original transcript:

**Question:** Normally you carried a gun with you, didn’t you, Jack?

**Answer:** Yes I did.

**Question:** There was nothing unusual you had with you that day?

**Answer:** No, I always carried a gun because of various alterations I had in my club then. I carried pretty large sums of money at times.

**Question:** You had your dog with you, Sheba?

**Answer:** Yes, I did.

**Question:** Will you tell about Sheba, Jack?

**Answer:** Well, I was fond of Sheba. She brought me a very large litter and I raised the litter by myself in my apartment, and I distributed the dogs to certain friends, but I kept Sheba and another dog called Clipper.

**Question:** Was she with you that day?

**Answer:** Yes, I left her in the car. The ironclad part of this is that had I not made an illegal turn behind the bus to the parking lot, had I gone the way I was supposed to—straight down Main Street—I would have never met this fate because the difference in meeting this fate was 30 seconds one way or the other...

The record portion ends on the following ane.

**Question:** Is there anything else you think that I ought to know, Jack? Are you uncomfortable?

**Question:** My rectum is—I’m bedridden, you know.

**Question:** You got sores, huh?

**Answer:** It’s not sores, it’s the pain.

The original transcript continues on, however:

**Question:** Jack, when you left the Western Union office, what made you walk toward the jail house?

**Answer:** Because when I drove by I saw some people down at the ramp and the curiosity had aroused me because of the flash in my mind seeing the people there, before I went to Western Union as I drove by on Main Street.

**Question:** Is there anything else you can think of, Jack, anything else when you were walking or going down there? Did you think about it?

**Answer:** I don’t know what to think...happened.

**Question:** Well, you are doing very well—just think a minute. Do you remember anything when you reached the bottom of the ramp?

**Answer:** Yeah, I did, like I said, a flash came to me from the point at the bottom of the ramp at the time that I was grappling with the police officers for the gun. Actually, what had happened I don’t know at the time...

There’s just one thing. Jack Ruby was once convinced that Lyndon Johnson was behind a plot to kill President Kennedy, according to a letter Ruby wrote while in his jail cell, one of half a dozen he’d written to a prison trustee, Thomas E. Miller, who is currently living in Dallas.

The letter—supposedly from Charles Hamilton Autograph, Inc. by Dill Diehl, a consultant for the St. Paul Dispatch—was guaranteed as to accuracy and has been insured for over $1,000. In it, Ruby claimed that President Johnson "found me as the perfect setup for a frame. Remember, the only one who had all to gain was Johnson himself. Figure that out."

Let us assume that this was merely the rambling of a madman.

A friend of mine, Bernard Gavzer—a feature writer for the Associated Press who has been on the scene—says that Ruby "was tormented by hallucinations in which he imagined that millions of American Jews were being slain in pogroms as punishment because he, a Jew, silenced the alleged killer of a president.

Ruby could be rational on certain levels and wholly irrational on others. He might be watching a football game on television and something would touch him off—like a penalty. ‘Worse is being done to the Jews,’ he would say."

Nevertheless, one wishes that Elmer Gertz had seized upon the opportunity to ask what was meant by that bit of correspondence. At best, we would have been able to see how this victim of circumstances tried to confront the inconsistency of his persecutory delusions.

Now Jack Ruby’s dirty little secret has been forever sealed away in his armchair by the byrden of history.