

LAST WITNESS

ALSO BY STAN WILCZEK JR.

The Kept Secret

The Soma Man

Death's Revenge

LAST WITNESS

STAN WILCZEK JR.

PYRAMID PUBLISHING INC.
UTICA, NEW YORK

This book is a work of fiction. Certain real locations and public figures are mentioned, but all other names, characters, places, and incidences are either a product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, organizations, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Copyright © 2013 by Stan Wilczek Jr.
All rights reserved.

Cover photograph by Walt Cisco, *Dallas Morning News*.
Work in public domain; copyright expired in 1991 without renewal.
First published on 24 November 1963.

Printed in the United States of America

First Printing: October 2013
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 978-1-886166-38-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Wilczek, Stan.

Last witness / By Stan Wilczek Jr.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-886166-38-7 (alk. paper)

1. Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963--Assassination--Fiction. 2.

Witnesses--Fiction. I. Title.

PS3623.I534L37 2013

813'.6--dc23

2013026071

Pyramid Publishing Inc.
PO Box 8339
Utica, New York 13505

www.pyramidpublishing.com

For Rose

*Every time I think it can't get any better . . .
You prove me wrong!*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Although I am publishing this novel a year after *Death's Revenge*, it has been years in the making. My shelf is packed with books, and files are full of articles, on the JFK assassination. I have been obsessed with the topic since that fateful day on November 22, 1963 when my sixth grade teacher, Mr. Furgal, walked into our classroom, visibly shaken, and delivered the news.

Many thanks to those of you who answered my questions on topics from Alzheimer's, to the assassination, to . . . well, you'll find out as you read on. A special thanks to Frank Baran for your detailed editorial comments and suggestions

A very special thanks to the staff at Pyramid Publishing, specifically Zach Steffen. None of this would happen without you.

To those who think you see yourself or others described in this book (you know who you are), let me assure you that you do not. Also, because this novel is totally fictitious, nothing in it is true, except of course for the parts that are!

Finally, I want to thank all of you who took the time to read and then provide me with such great feedback on *The Kept Secret*, *The Soma Man*, and *Death's Revenge*. I hope you again find this book clutched in your hands when you know you should be doing something else.

As a final note, any and all mistakes contained herein are mine.

LAST WITNESS

Prologue

November 22, 1963

The black Lincoln Continental was about to change from a limo to a hearse right before the four-year-old's eyes.

"Papa . . . I gotta pee."

"Reece, here comes the president."

"Where?" Even though he wasn't sure what a president was he stood up, ignoring the pain in his over-filled bladder, and stared at the approaching parade. Reece knew for days of the president's visit through stories from his father. However the only thing he could remember was the president was like a king, only he didn't wear a crown. As he balanced on his tiptoes he was again reminded of the hour-long drive to Dallas earlier this morning from his home in the prairie – he had to pee.

"Wow . . . motorcycles!" Reece looked up at his father who was standing next to him and pulled on his arm.

"Reece, stop it. I can't hold the camera steady with you pulling on me."

"But Papa, motorcycles. Police are riding them."

"Stop hitting me!"

"Can I take a picture of the motorcycles?"

"Yes . . . but be careful with my camera it's . . ."

"I know, I know . . . it's not a toy."

Reece picked up the thirty-five millimeter Pentax camera from the leather bag and placed the cloth strap around his neck. He reached down and brought the camera to his eye, just as the motorcycle passed in front of him, adjusted the focus on the lens like his father had taught him, and snapped the picture. He reached with his thumb, flipped the lever on the top of the camera to advance the film, and took a second picture of the policeman on the motorcycle.

“Reece, here comes the president.”

Just as he snapped the third picture of the motorcycle, Reece jumped as the loud cracking noise echoed across the plaza.

“Oh boy . . . firecrackers.”

“Reece, there’s the president. Take his picture.”

Before he could get the camera up to his eye and aimed at the black limo a second loud cracking noise startled him and his finger snapped a picture. Without thinking he advanced the film and aimed the camera at the car now directly in front of him. As his finger pressed the button on the camera several more loud noises again caused him to jump. He stared through the viewfinder and saw something red spray out of the car.

“REECE, GET DOWN!”

Before Reece could look up he felt his father falling on him crushing him to the grassy ground.

“Papa, you’re hurting me.”

Reece tried to push his father away.

“Papa . . . there’s blood on my hands.”

1

“Professor . . . is it true that . . .” – the longer than normal pause told Reece exactly what was coming next – “you were in Dealey Plaza when . . . when they killed the president?”

Reece continued to write on the whiteboard as he glanced down at his wristwatch. Fourteen minutes. Another record broken. It was just over twenty minutes before the previous seminar participants got up the nerve to ask that question. This was a lot sooner than the seminars conducted years ago. He smiled. So much for the theory that today’s youth only speak their mind when hidden behind the clicking of their invisible digital walls.

Dealey Plaza. Fifty years ago. He had been there. Along with 417 other people – although the exact number, like it seemed everything else about the JFK assassination, may never really be known – who watched the most famous, the most documented, and the most witnessed murder of the twentieth century.

Ask anyone who was four years of age or older on that day, “Where were you when JFK was shot?” and they would likely still be able to tell you exactly where they were and what they were doing. But how many can say they were there, within twenty feet of the president, as the shots rang out. And how many can say their entire life had been shaped by

those brief six seconds in Dealey Plaza. From the first seconds following the gunshots, to almost fifty years later.

Reece glanced at his watch again as he turned and faced the thirty pairs of eyes bearing down on him from the elevated classroom. "Who asked that question?" A young, very good-looking, petit, short-haired, blonde sitting in the front row raised her hand without hesitation. Reece glanced at the name card in front of her. "Ms. Dexter?" She nodded. "Yes . . . I was in Dealey Plaza. But as to whether 'They' killed the president, that's what you are here to try to determine, isn't it?"

2

Reece stood in the doorway staring at his mother staring out the window. He would give anything to know what she was thinking. And he would give more than anything if what she was thinking was real.

“Hi Mama,” Reece said in a quiet voice as he tapped on the heavy, light oak, wooden door with the tip of his fingers.

Without turning around Dora Landis responded in a not so quiet voice, “Would that be my favorite son coming to visit his favorite mama?”

“Favorite son?”

Dora turned around. “Even though you are my only son, you can still be my favorite one, can’t you?”

“And favorite mama?”

“Favorite mama sounds better than only mama.”

“So does favorite son.”

They walked toward each other, clasped hands, and leaned in to kiss.

“You had me concerned there for a second.”

“Thinking you had a long-lost brother?”

“Thinking you were going to tell me you were not my real mama.”

“But I’ve told you many times before that you were not my real son, so that shouldn’t be a surprise to you.”

“Not today though.”

“No . . . not today.”

Reece looked into his mother’s eyes. “How are you doing today?”

“Today is a good day. At least I think it is a good day. That’s the thing about Alzheimer’s. I could be having the best day of my life and not even know it. Of course, I could also be having the worst day of my life and not know it. The disease does have its side benefits. By the way, who are you again?”

“Funny.”

Reece made it a point to visit his mother at Loretto, a senior residential community in Syracuse, New York, at least three times a week. He had moved her there less than two years ago, first into independent senior housing, which lasted only six months – or until the third time Dora had wandered off and came to not knowing where she was – and then to a facility with twenty-four hour care and supervision.

Dora started exhibiting signs of Alzheimer’s in her late sixties, although no one, including her, would admit it. When she turned seventy, however, the disease seemed to progress exponentially. Now at seventy-three, she did have good days and bad days. Unfortunately it was becoming more and more difficult to know if it was Dora who you were speaking to, or the disease that had taken over her mind.

“Didn’t you start your JFK seminar this morning?”

“Yes I did. You remembered.”

“How many years have you been doing this?”

“It’s my twentieth year.”

“Oh my Lord. How time flies. Are they still impressed that you actually witnessed the assassination?”

“To some extent I think so, but it certainly has a lot more meaning to your generation and mine than it does to today’s youth.”

“That’s because we lived through that terrible time.”

“True. But today’s generation doesn’t seem to be as interested as others were years ago. I read somewhere that if you asked the question ‘How did JFK die?’ the baby boomer would say he was assassinated in

Dallas, Texas, the Generation Xer would say in a plane crash off Martha's Vineyard, and the Generation Yer would type into their smart phone 'Who is JFK?'. Most of the participants are made up of this last generation."

"Well, that's one of the challenges of teaching college now-a-days. You can end up with three or more generations of students in your class. If you would have taught kindergarten like me, you wouldn't have that problem. But being a law professor at Syracuse University . . . well I guess that's a little more challenging than my job ever was."

"I don't know about that. I don't think I could deal with twenty-five five-year-olds. Although sometimes I think that is exactly who I am dealing with. I remember last semester when a student explained that she didn't have her homework because her dog had eaten her flash-drive. Funny, when I was a kid dogs ate paper. I wonder what it is about dogs and homework?"

"So how are your participants in this year's seminar?"

"Based on this morning's meeting, I'd say this year's seminar may be one of the better ones. They all appear to be Type A personalities and very motivated. Most of them are in their mid-twenties. Naïve, but along with that comes a questioning attitude with no preconceived biases. There is one older woman, I mean in her maybe mid to late thirties, and she has already passed the Bar. But she also has degrees in computer science and art and photography of all things. She must be a professional student."

"How much longer do you think you will be conducting this seminar?"

"What do you mean?"

"It's been fifty years. Are people still interested in the JFK assassination?"

"I still have a waiting list every year of people trying to get into this seminar, taught in the summer I might add. So that's one indication. Of course it doesn't hurt that anyone who participates in this seminar is pretty much guaranteed a job with any one of a hundred law firms around the country."

“You should be proud . . . it’s a tribute to who you pick and how you work them. You’re pre-screening the applicants for these firms.”

“True, but I don’t want people to participate just for the guarantee of a job. It bothers me that none of these people have lived through the event. And after twenty years of these summer sessions, we’ve almost run out of conspiracy theories to study.”

“And you’ve disproved them all.”

“Actually, the seminar participants disproved them all. I just facilitated the discussion. And that’s the premise of the seminar. Let a young fresh set of eyes look at the evidence and come to a conclusion.”

“And you are still fully funded?”

“The Foundation that funds it – my salary and expenses, a generous stipend for all participants, along with the tuition and room and board expenses – still pays in advance, every January first, so we can advertise and fill the seminar well before the summer semester starts.”

“And the only thing they want from you is a final report of what the students found?”

“That’s it . . . and of course my commitment to do it all again next year. Obviously I’m one of their selling points for the program. Probably attracts a better cohort of students. Doesn’t matter how good I am or how good the seminar is . . . I was there. Regardless, I have enjoyed doing every one of them.”

“And . . . I’m sure you will enjoy this one.”

“I’m sure I will too. Hey, look at the time. I should be going.” Reece walked over to his mother who was again staring out the window and kissed her on the cheek. She didn’t move. “See you on Wednesday.”

Reece turned and walked toward the door. Just as he reached it Dora said, “I know I probably shouldn’t tell you this . . . but your father was here today. He is very proud of you.”

Reece stopped, turned, and stared at his mother. She finally turned and looked him in the eye. “He also loves you very much and wishes his life with you could have been different. His whole life has been about

Last Witness

protecting you and me you know.” She wiped a tear from her cheek. “He said someday you would understand.” She again turned and stared out the window.

Reece walked out of the room and down the hall. His eyes went blurry with tears. It wasn't the first time his mother had claimed to have seen and talked to his father, and he was certain it wouldn't be the last. The disease would make sure of that. He was also now certain that this was not as good a day as he had thought for her. He assumed it never was whenever she claimed to have seen and spoken to his father, since he died on November 22, 1963 – six hours after the president was assassinated.

3

“Tia?” Tia, texting three people at once on her smart phone, looked up at the woman who had interrupted her concentration. “Hi Tia, I’m Kayla.”

“Hi Kayla . . . Tia Diaz.” The women clasped each other’s right hands as Kayla slid into the curved chair surrounding the round tabled booth.

“Kayla Dexter.”

“O M G! You’re the one who asked the question this morning.”

“Somebody had to . . . I just figured, why not me?”

“You know what that means, don’t you?”

“That’s just a rumor that’s been passed down from year to year. It’s almost like all those conspiracies we are trying to disprove.”

“Or prove!”

“Okay, or prove. But in this case I can’t find any factual basis behind it. As I said, it’s just a rumor.”

“If it’s just a rumor, why were you so quick to be the one to speak up?”

“Well . . . in case it isn’t just a rumor . . . a girl can never be too prepared.”

“You watch, you’re gonna be his favorite one. The person who asks that question, ‘Were you in Dealey Plaza?’, becomes his favorite. And you just happen to sit in the front row. I suppose that was a coincidence?”

“Like I said, a girl can never be too prepared. Besides, as my mother

Last Witness

used to say, 'I wouldn't throw him out of bed for eating crackers'. Would you?"

"No. But I think the more modern version of that saying is I wouldn't throw him out of bed for texting."

"Crackers, texting, what's the difference? I know I wouldn't throw Dr. Landis out of bed for . . . I'm not sure if there's anything? Am I right?"

"Maybe . . . maybe not. It doesn't matter anyway. You've already claimed that spot."

"But you do admit he's hot?"

"For an older man."

"Older men are more experienced."

"And you know this how?"

"Rumor."

"By the way you are blushing, I don't think it's by rumor."

"Okay then. Way too much information for having met only three minutes ago."

"You're right. Way too much information. But by the way you are blushing I have a feeling I'm going to know every juicy detail before this month is out." Tia then winked.

"So . . . where's the third member of our team?"

This morning's seminar concluded with an assignment to divide up the group into three-person teams. Each team would spend the afternoon getting to know each other and to start to lay out the next month's plan. Team six decided to meet at Citrus on the Hill, the bar located off the lobby of the Sheraton Syracuse University Hotel, the same hotel all seminar participants would call home for the next month.

"Good question. Our third teammate is R. Stone. Male or female . . . do you know?"

"I have no idea. That's one of the problems when you text someone you don't know. Digital communications can be sexless."

"Excuse me. You wouldn't happen to be team six, would you?"

"We sure would. I'm Tia Diaz." Tia reached over the table and shook

hands.

“And I’m Kayla Dexter.” Kayla replaced Tia’s hand. “Come sit.” She patted the couch-like seat next to her.

“Hi, I’m Rose Stone. Sorry I’m late. Lost track of time.”

“No problem. We were just talking about how Kayla here is going to have sex with Dr. Landis.”

“Were you the one who asked about . . .”

“Yes, that would be me.”

“See . . . you’ve already made an impression on all of us. You no doubt made an impression on him too.”

“I’m sure that’s just a rumor. Anyway, I think he has a lady friend.”

Kayla and Tia turned to Rose with that ‘how do you know’ look on their faces.

“I have a friend who works at the college. She told me . . . what?”

“Why would you even be curious?” Kayla asked.

“Probably for the same reason as you and every other woman in that room is curious. He’s not married, never has been. He’s gorgeous, especially for a fifty-four-year-old, although he looks like he is no older than forty. And, he’s hot. It’s just too bad he’s not my type.”

“And if you don’t mind me asking,” Tia butted in, “how old are you?” Rose just stared back at her. “I mean, you have to have a bachelors degree and either be pursuing or completed a law degree to be accepted into the program. None of us has a full time job. But if we do well, and get a good recommendation from Landis, we will. Everyone else in the room this morning appeared to be in their mid-twenties, and certainly no one looked older than thirty . . . except for maybe you. Oh, and that guy in the front.”

“I don’t think you look older than thirty,” Kayla now butted in.

“You’re right. I’m probably not the typical person who applies or gets selected for this program. I completed my undergraduate degree almost twenty years ago in art with a minor in photography. I also have an undergraduate degree in computer science and just passed the Bar. I

worked for about fifteen years, but now I don't need to. My father and mother were killed in an automobile accident five years ago. I was their only child. So now I can afford not to work. My father was a lawyer. After he died I decided to fulfill his dream and be a lawyer, or at least become a lawyer. So that's what brings me here. And as you've probably already figured out, I'm in my forties . . . early forties."

"Regardless of our ages, I'm not sure how we ended up with an all female team and worse yet an all blonde female team, although I don't think we are all real blondes."

"Yeah . . . how are we ever going to be taken seriously?"

"We are going to do it by working harder than any other team here. We've got to come up with our own theories that no one else has thought about. Why don't we share what we've already come up with?"

"Sounds like a great idea to me."

The three of them spent the next three hours sharing their own thoughts and ideas, ones that in some cases they had each thought about for years, about the JFK assassination. By the end of the afternoon it was as if the three had known each other forever.

"I still don't think you look older than thirty."

"It doesn't matter how old I look, does it Kayla? I don't think I will be in competition with you for Landis. First, I don't plan on making a pass at the gorgeous doctor. As I said, he's not my type. Second, you asked the question. You are probably going to be his favorite." Rose slid out from behind the round table, took a step, and then turned around. "But before I go, I should let you in on a little secret. Some men prefer older women. They are much more experienced, and take my word for it . . . I am."

4

“I’m in the mood for you tonight.”

“And what kind of mood would that be?”

“Whatever you want, I’ll do. The choice is yours.”

“You’re gonna bottom.”

“Did you wanna think about it?”

“I’ve have been thinking about it. Ever since we talked.”

“Bad day, huh?”

“Tough day . . . emotionally tough day . . . frustrating too. And we might as well add depressing.” Reece picked up his drink – Single Barrel JD, straight up – from the bar he was leaning on and, after sniffing the aroma of the room-temperature liquid, took a long, slow sip.

“I had a feeling from our conversation that you might be in the mood for a session. I also had a feeling that you might want to take your frustrations out on me.”

“Oh you did?” He sipped his drink again, only this time longer.

“Uh-huh . . . and I got wet thinking about what you might do to me.” She somehow slid her hand down her belly and into the skin-tight waistband of her jeans. Her face was expressionless as her fingers found what they were looking for and lingered for more than a moment. She slowly removed her hand and placed her soaked fingers first on his lips, gently

rubbing the top then bottom one, before forcing them into his mouth. He bit down, closed his lips tight, and slowly moved his tongue between her fingers. Seconds later he loosened his teeth and she slowly pulled her fingers out from between his still tightened lips.

She reached down and picked up her large glass of Grey Goose and pink lemonade. She stirred the ice around with the same fingers that were a second ago in his mouth and took several long sips from the glass, all the while her eyes never left his. "I'll be back in fifteen minutes." She turned and slowly walked across the room to the open metal circular stairway, and then even more slowly strutted up the stairs, her high heels clinging loudly against each metal step, as she disappeared through the opening to the floor above.

What started off as a great day for Reece – the beginning of his annual summer seminar on the Conspiracy Theories Surrounding the JFK Assassination, which has always been the highlight of his year for the past nineteen – turned depressing as he walked out of the doorway of his mother's room. Outwardly she was the picture of health looking ten years younger than her actual age of seventy-three. And if you didn't know she had Alzheimer's, you would think she was a specimen of health on the inside too. She could carry on an intelligent conversation for hours, recalling the most minute details of a past event. The trouble was, unless you were familiar with the event she was talking about, you didn't know if what she was saying really happened or was something invented by the disease invading her mind.

What was even more frightening was that the disease seemed to be speeding up its assault. Reece felt as if his mother was being kidnapped right before his eyes, one body part at a time, and there was nothing he could do to stop it. And to make matters worse, it appeared to Reece that the disease was purposefully taunting him. It started six months ago with a simple sentence that somehow made its way into the middle of a conversation he was having with his mother. "You know your father loves you very much."

At first he wrote it off as a simple mistake – “loved” not “loves”. In fact, the more he thought about it later, the more he was certain she had said “loved”. He forgot about it, until three months later, when she said out of the blue, “You just missed your father.” Only that one statement. No mention of it again for the remaining hour he was with her. Then a month later, then two weeks later, and now weekly there is another comment about his father – always doing things in the present – as if he were alive. And now less disguised. Not just a single sentence buried in the conversation – one you might miss if you were not listening carefully. But several sentences – a much more complete thought. And for the first time today preceded by, “I know I probably shouldn’t tell you this,” as if the still healthy side of her brain knows she shouldn’t be sharing a secret, but the diseased side has taken over and makes her reveal it.

As he stood in the doorway of the room earlier today watching his mother stare out the window he wanted to run over to her and scream in her ear, “My father is dead . . . he’s been dead for almost fifty years!” Instead he bit his tongue, turned, and walked out of the room. His racing heart and heavy breathing quickly combined with tearful eyes.

“Why is she doing this to me?” he cried out in anger when he got to his car. Then he realized it wasn’t her – it was the disease. Why was the disease attacking him then? Wasn’t it enough that it was devouring his mother?

On his drive home to his townhouse in Fayetteville, a village in the town of Dewitt, just east of Syracuse, he decided he needed to de-stress. Happy hour at one of his favorite local establishments, Shifty’s, a bar located on Burnet Ave in Syracuse, seemed like the best place to go. An hour into several glasses of Jack and diets he received a call from his companion, although Meeka considered herself his woman, or more precisely, his only woman. After all, she had her own drawer, several changes of clothes in his closet, makeup and toiletries in the bathroom, and spent most, but not all, nights in his bed. The call was short. It didn’t take Meeka long to figure out her man needed cheering up. And she

also knew what an hour or two of a happy hour would do to him. He would want something when he got home, and she would be ready. As she sat at the bar in the playroom – although most people would just call it a den – on the ground floor of the townhouse fantasizing, she could feel herself get wet.

Reece felt his heart pound in his chest as he heard, faintly at first, but then grow louder with each step, her seven inch stiletto platforms as they clanged against the metal steps. The sound suddenly stopped. Reece looked around the room one last time to make sure everything was in place. The room was dimly lit by dozens of scattered candles and a small spotlight that shined down from the ceiling casting a round, four foot circle of light on the middle of the floor. The faint sound of rapper music, the kind that contained more profanity than a men's room wall, could be heard in the background. On the bar were his instruments as he liked to call them. This evening he thought he would only go with a few – a twenty-six inch riding crop with a two inch leather tail, an eighteen inch rubber slapper, and a pair of silver Japanese clover clips lay neatly spaced along the right front edge of the bar. Draped over the edge of the bar was a well worn, but very effective, twenty-four inch black leather flogger, tails slightly hardened from dried juices, both male and female.

“May I enter, Master?” Meeka's voice, slightly trembling with combined excitement and fear, echoed down the round opening of the stairwell.

Reece reached for his drink and emptied the last of the Jack into his mouth. He put his hand on his bare chest. He could feel his heart pounding. He could also feel the pounding in his crotch as the tight black leather pants he was wearing, the only thing he was wearing, held his throbbing rod from going stiff. He took a deep breath to try to calm himself. He didn't want her to know how excited he was, although after three years of role-playing with her, BDSM being one of the things she had taught him and she enjoyed the most, he knew she knew he was probably throbbing so hard he couldn't walk, or talk in a normal relaxed voice.

He took another deep breath. "Take your place."

Within seconds the clanging started again and slowly Meeka circled down the round staircase exposing first her platforms, then long black seamed stocking covered legs, black leather garter belt, and nothing else which exposed her perky 36D breasts with their dark pointed silver dollar sized nipples. She kept her head down as she slowly strutted – knowing what effect she was having on what she knew was his throbbing pole – to the circle of light, turned to face him, then kneeled, back straight, arms to her side, and head still bowed.

Reece walked over and stood in front of her, just out of the circle of light, but close enough that he knew she could smell the heated leather of his pants. "Are you ready to please me?"

"Yes, Master. I am ready to please you."

Reece again took in a slow deep breath. "Anything I want?"

"Anything," Meeka answered without hesitating.

"Assume the position against the bar."

Meeka stood up, head still bowed, walked over and leaned against the bar with her arms and legs stretched out straight and spread apart. It was a position she was very familiar with. She glanced to her right at the top of the bar to see what her master had in store for her. Her heart, already racing, pounded even harder when she saw what was there. She turned her gaze forward and closed her eyes, contemplating what he might do next. Her wait was short.

"AHHHH!" Her scream echoed through the room. It felt as if the rubber slapper had just taken a bite out of the cheeks of her ass. "He's going right to the bad shit . . . must have been a real bad day," Meeka mumbled to herself.

"What did you say?"

"I said . . . you're a sick sadistic prick!" and then she braced herself for what she knew was going to happen next.