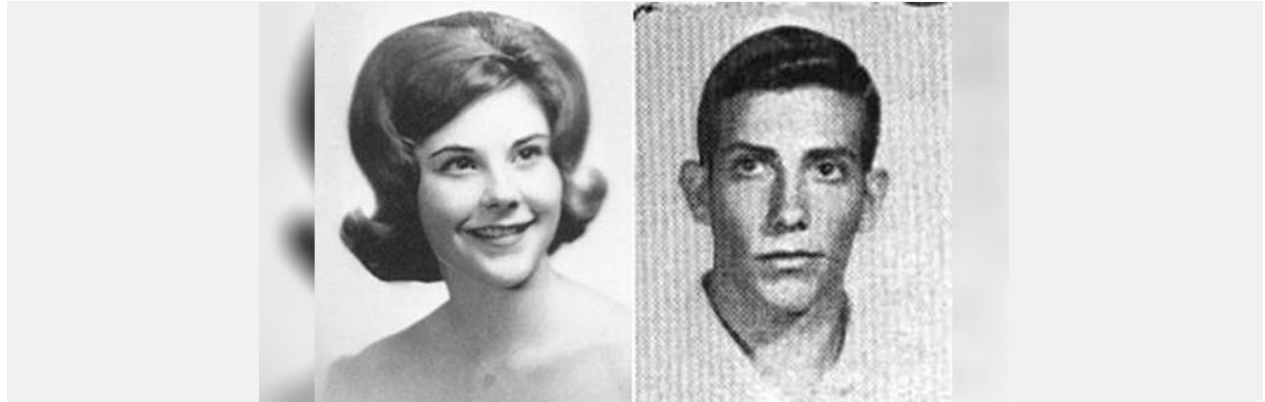


A dark road in the middle of nowhere

By: [R. Marc Kantrowitz](#) January 17, 2019



Laura Welch and Michael Douglas

Born on Nov. 4, 1946, in Midland, Texas, Laura Lane Welch was the apple of her parents' eye. As an only child, how couldn't she be?

With devoted parents, her father in real estate and her mother his bookkeeper, she grew to love life and literature. As she progressed in school, she rewarded her adoring parents by becoming an excellent student with a voracious appetite for reading. And then came Nov. 6, 1963, two days after her 17th birthday.

As popular as Laura might have been, she took a backseat to her good friend and classmate Michael Dutton Douglas. A star athlete — excelling in football and track — he was as accomplished off the field as on.

Likeable, smart and outgoing, he possessed a quick wit. In his junior year, Michael won an award typically given to seniors, voted the most popular boy in the entire school. He dated Regan Gammon, who also was close to Laura. The three, along with their mutual friends, spent hours talking and socializing.

On Nov. 6, a Wednesday, Laura borrowed her father's Chevy Impala, picked up her friend Judy Dykes and headed off to an isolated area where a drive-in movie was located. They excitedly chattered along the way, of boys and girls, their senior year, and the night and year ahead.

As Laura drove, darkness mixed with the unlit, uncrowded road in the middle of nowhere, encouraging speed. Despite having some visual limitations, Laura obliged, hurling forward at 50 miles per hour, five miles under the speed limit.

In the back of her mind, Laura knew a turn was ahead. It just seemed so far away. Until it wasn't.

Too late, Judy screamed, "There's a stop sign!"

"I just couldn't stop. I was going along The next thing I knew, I was in the intersection, and immediately in front of me was another car. It came rushing out of the darkness, and I was right upon it, with a second to turn the wheel. All I heard was the horrible sound of metal colliding, the catastrophic boom that occurs when two hard pieces of steel make contact."

Michael Douglas, who had the right of way and was also traveling near the high-speed limit, was thrown from his car. His father, who was travelling behind, saw his son killed.

Though Laura and Judy walked away from the accident, the killing devastated Laura.

"[My very close friend Mike] was a handsome boy with a beautiful smile, and he was a top athlete at Lee." At the hospital, Laura prayed her friend would survive. "The only answer [I received] was the sound of Mrs. Douglas' sobs on the other side of that thin emergency room curtain."

As the days turned into months, the horror slowly receded as life, as it always does, inexorably moved on. She graduated high school that spring and went on to college, Southern Methodist University in Dallas, where she majored in education. Putting her training to work, she became an elementary school teacher until she left to return to school to earn a master's degree in library science. Finding work as a librarian, she stayed until 1977, when she met her future husband in July and married him four months later, in November.

He would say of his wife: "I saw an elegant, beautiful woman who turned out not only to be elegant and beautiful, but very smart and willing to put up with my rough edges, and I must confess has smoothed them off over time."

Indeed, with her help and support, he conquered a serious drinking problem and changed, for the far better, into the person he later became.

For all of her accomplishments and assets, however, the events of 1963 will forever haunt her.

Epilogue

The area of the accident was a dangerous one. In fact, prior to Michael losing his life there, two other people were killed in car crashes. After Michael's accident, the city posted warnings and installed a larger stop sign.

Laura was never charged for her role in his death.

In 1981, she gave birth to fraternal twins. Over the following decades she worked diligently on programs supporting children's literacy, health and welfare, and raised money for her great loves — libraries and literature.

In 2000, her husband, George W. Bush, was elected the 43rd president of the United States.

The above column is based on various internet sources. R. Marc Kantrowitz, a retired judge, can be contacted at rmarckantrowitz@comcast.net.