#### Correcting the record



Alive and angry: Yamilet Fernandez holds a photo Jack Kelley shot of her while he was on assignment in Cuba. Kelley told USA TODAY editors that the photo was of a woman named Yacqueline. He reported in a March 10, 2000, story that Yacqueline died while fleeing Cuba.

### Cuba, February 2000

# Woman who died in Cuba story alive in USA

By Blake Morrison USA TODAY

When USA TODAY foreign correspondent Jack Kelley returned from Cuba in February 2000, he brought home an incredible tale — and a photo he took to

The story was of a woman, Yacqueline, whom Kelley said he watched flee Cuba for the USA. Six refugees, including Yacqueline and her little son, drowned the next day when a storm sank their boat, Kelley wrote. Atop the front-page, eyewitness narrative stood the photo that seemed to authenticate the tragedy — a picture of Yacqueline that Kelley said he took just days before her fateful trip.

The story, reprinted months later in Reader's Digest, was a lie from start to finish, an examination of Kelley's work shows.

The "crescent moon" that the story says 'guided" the fleeing refugees had not risen above the horizon early that morning. The "storm" that Kelley wrote killed Yacqueline never occurred.

And the woman in the picture — a woman who Kelley wrote was swallowed by the sea — is alive, married, pregnant and now living in the southeastern United States, where she arrived from Cuba as a legal im-

migrant one year ago. For three years, the woman in the photo, Yamilet Fernandez, knew only that Kelley had published the photo alongside a story he had written about Cuba. The hostess at the Havana hotel where Kelley stayed now realizes Kelley could have cost her everything — her job and her future in the USA if Cuban authorities had found out who she was and thought the piece, she said in a recent interview.

Kelley, shown the picture of Fernandez on Thursday, refused to acknowledge that she was the woman he called "Yacqueline."

'This is not the same person," he said. Fernandez and her husband, Fidel Santalo — neither of whom speak much English — remain angry and incredulous.

they plan to call the police.

"She was very angry because, in Cuba, if they had found out, she would have lost her job and they might have taken away her visa," says the neighbor, who translated for Fernandez.

A USA TODAY reporter traveled to Cuba, discovered the real identity of the woman in the photo and subsequently located Fernandez earlier this month.

About a week after Fernandez was contacted by the newspaper and shown the story, she hired lawyer Emilia Diaz Fox.

#### 'A mistake'

Fernandez says the only reason she knew Kelley had published her picture was that he had called her around the time the story was printed, March 10, 2000. The call began with him asking a question, she recalls: Do you have any relatives in the United States? When she told him no, he began to apologize and told her he had made "a mistake" and published her picture, Fernandez says. The call ended within two minutes,

Whether that call came before or after the story was published is unclear, but if Kelley did view the decision to use her photo as a "mistake," he perpetuated the

He never told USA TODAY editors what he had done. He failed to alert Reader's Digest, which reprinted the photo. And in one presentation to the Evangelical Press Association in 2000, Kelley told another lie about the circumstances under which the

"Just before the, the day before the boat left, the boyfriend of the woman named Yacqueline, who drowned with her 15 month old, said 'Would you take a picture of me and my girlfriend? Um, and then could you mail this picture back to me?' I said, 'Sure.' Well, that was the last picture that was ever taken of her," he said, ac-

They once considered Kelley a friend. Now, if he tries to contact them, a neighbor says, answer session to the group. answer session to the group.

In truth, Fernandez says, the photo was taken on the balcony of her apartment. Kelley, she says, told her he wanted to send it to Santalo's mother.

This month, a neighbor translated Kelley's story for her — the passages about "Yacqueline's" tragic death and the even more painful sections about the choices "Yacqueline" was forced to make to secure a job. Fernandez, the neighbor says, can prove she's alive, but undoing the damage of the other passage is more difficult.

#### No moon, no storm

The newspaper had examined the Cuba story last year, during its first inquiry into Kelley's work. At the time, Kelley — still on staff pending the results of the investigation — offered reporter Mark Memmott tips on how to verify the story. Despite traveling to Cuba, Memmott could find no evidence to

show the story was true or false.

When the inquiry into Kelley's work began anew in February, a different USA TODAY reporter scrutinized the story more closely. It had numerous problems:

► Kelley could not have observed any exodus of refugees from Cardenas, Cuba, that was "guided by the dim light of a crescent moon." That's because there was no moon over Cardenas at 5 a.m Feb. 4, 2000, the day the story says the refugees fled. On that morning, the moon remained beneath the horizon until 6:25 a.m. Even when it rose, just a fraction of it — about 1% — was visible, an astronomer with the U.S. Naval

Observatory in Washington, D.C., said.

The storm that Kelley wrote killed many of the refugees never occurred. Weather reports from Varadero, Cuba, the weather station nearest to where the refugees would have left, reported calm conditions on the two days Kelley wrote the group was at sea.

Kelley's story says winds reached "33 mph." In fact, they never exceeded 16 miles

Hey bro! How are you? Thank you for helping me out with this story. I appreciate it.

Please read the story about the settlers in Hebron. I've attached it to the end of this e-

Jewish settler named Avi Shapiro in his home and took him to Shin Bet headquarters in

mail. Two days after the story was published, Shin Bet went to Hebron, found the

per hour. The newspaper also examined calls from ships between Varadero and the Florida Straits, the area where the "storm" would have occurred. Reports that day from eight ships nearest to where Kelley says the refugees' boat capsized in "raging seas" – within 12 miles of the Cuban coast, he wrote – reported winds even calmer than those at the Varadero station. None reported bad weather.

Yacqueline: Had

ing only days be-

dreamed of drown-

SPECIAL REPORT: LEAVING CUBA

Quest for freedom

carries

a price

time for goodbyes.

or a lonely death.

By Jack Kelley USA TODAY

only a final wave. For

this desperate group of Cubans, hope is worth

the risk of failure, arrest

CARDENAS, Cuba - Guided by the dim light of a crescent moon, nine people, one pregnant and one carrying a young child, crept from a grove of mangrove trees

Under the cover of night, they head to sea in a small boat. There's no

> ► Kelley was likely at the Havana airport when his story — and a typed two-page diary he gave USA TODAY to support his story – claim he was at a "sunrise" memorial service in Cardenas. The city is at least a two-hour cab ride from the Havana

> The sun rose in Cardenas at 7:06 a.m. the day Kelley wrote that he observed the memorial service. But his expense reports show he caught a flight to Cancun that morning — an hour-long flight that left at about 7:30 a.m.

> Records show Kelley was on that flight because he checked into his Cancun hotel at 9:10 a.m. Havana time (8:10 a.m. in Cancun). Even if Kelley had left the memorial service at daybreak — 7:06 a.m. — he would have had to travel more than 100 miles from Cardenas to the Havana airport, pass through customs and board his flight in 24 minutes, an impossibility.

On Thursday, Kelley defended the story by saying this about the exodus that never occurred: "I witnessed it myself. I saw it myself. I saw it with my own eyes. Honest

#### **Draft contains prophecy**

Cuban authorities likely never detained Kelley either, as he told editors at the newspaper. In the story, Kelley described the facility where he was detained, Villa Marista, as having a "30-foot-high sculpture of an AK-47 at its main gate." No such sculpture exists now or when Kelley was there, the reporter who traveled to Cuba found.

And Cuban officials say they have no

record of Kelley being detained.

"We saw that (story) as the State Department or the CIA launching a smear campaign," says Roberto de Armas, a Cuban foreign ministry official.
"It was lying from the beginning to the

end of the article.'

A panel of journalists from outside USA TODÂY continues its efforts to analyze the editing and reporting practices that allowed this story and others Kelley fabricated to be published.

What editors did not know, however, was the story behind the story:

► The first draft of the story, retrieved from Kelley's company-owned laptop computer after the newspaper located Fernandez, forecasts the future. The draft was saved on Feb. 4, 2000, the day Kelley wrote that the refugees left, and was not modified after that date. Even so, it contains this prophecy: "But it has now been 96 hours since the voyage began and there has been no reported sighting of her and the others by Coast Guard rescuers in

▶ Many of the names of characters, and their predicaments, also evolved between the draft and the published piece. Yacqueline, for instance, goes by three names in the first draft: Yacqueline, then Dominguez, and then Elizabeth. The widow Guadeloupe is named Nena; Joaquin is

▶ The reason for Yacqueline wanting to leave also is different in the two versions. In the published story, Kelley wrote that Yacqueline's actions were spurred by the need to help her father. Nowhere in the first draft is her father mentioned. Instead, to have decided to leave because she was unable to afford an operation to correct her son's wayward eye.

"I don't understand why," Fernandez's husband Santalo says. "I don't understand why because we helped him." Santalo calls the incident "very awful."

He calls Kelley "a master of disguise."

# **Scripts for 'sources'** found on computer

The cover-up that prompted Jack Kelley to resign was part of a larger effort by him to mislead the paper, documents retrieved from his company laptop show. In three letters, Kelley wrote answers for associates to offer those investigating his work. The scripts focus on stories he wrote from Yugoslavia, Pakistan and Israel.

#### Karachi, Pakistan

One of the scripts was written last year as USA TODAY began questioning a pair of March 2003 stories Kelley had filed from Karachi, Pakistan. One reported that he had joined intelligence agents on a hunt for Osama bin Laden. The other described a mosque where "pictures of President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, with targets on their faces," were nailed to the door.

Kelley told USA TODAY that Khurram Butt, a Pakistani pilot, helped him with logistics on the stories and could verify them. He said Butt could be reached through a relative. Kelley provided phone numbers for the relative, who had worked with him on other stories.

But Kelley had created a script for the relative in his computer. The script, which had two e-mail addresses

for the man at the top, asked for "a confidential favor." Kelley wrote that "the CIA has refused to acknowledge that it helped me with this story" and "has told me to come up with a cover story." CIA spokesman Bill Harlow called the explanation "not true.

The script called for the relative to tell USA TODAY that Butt would "be traveling for the next 6-8 weeks and can't be reached." It also urged him to "please follow this script" when contacted by the newspaper.

A computer analysis could not determine conclusive-

ly whether Kelley e-mailed the script. However, the relative gave the requested answers in response to phone calls and e-mails from two USA TODAY reporters. USA TODAY found Butt in Seattle, where he was in flight training for the new Boeing 777. He said he never

minutes, during a visit to his relative's home: "I have never been connected with journalism on anything." In May 2003, Kelley filed a travel reimbursement report with USA TODAY that listed \$1,050 in payments to Butt for "interpretation and transportation services"

worked with Kelley and met him only once, for 15-20

related in part to the Karachi stories. The pilot said he "never" received money from Kelley. Additionally, a Pakistani official said the drive Kelley described in the bin Laden story would take at least 10 hours, twice what he wrote. It is not possible to drive as

fast as the 90 mph he reported, the official also said. "I feel like I'm being set up," Kelley said Thursday when questioned about the story.

Dear Abou Adam:

I need you to be "David" one more time. This will be it. I promise. No more.

My colleague Mark will probably ask you:

## Several major stories appear to be accurate

The team investigating Jack Kelley's work found evidence that several major stories, including two nominated for a Pulitzer Prize

in 2001, appear to be accurate.

► On Sept. 28, 2001, Kelley's front-page exclusive on U.S. special forces hiding in Afghanistan and hunting for Osama bin Laden was questioned by some readers who doubted intelligence sources would divulge such sensitive information. Editors checked the story before publication with Pentagon officials, who had no objections. Also, a

retired special forces officer confirmed he was a source and that the story was accurately reported.

► In an eyewitness account that ran Oct. 16, 1995, Kelley described watching two Croats working with a research team



Kelley

discover a relative's corpse. The story prompted a letter from a member of the team who could not recall the incident or Kelley being there. Henry Lee, a Connecticut forensic pathologist, and Dragan Primorac, now a Croatian government official, recall Kelley actively reporting at the scene. A photograph in the Hartford Courant showed the family members who'd unearthed their relative.

▶ Kelley was one of several journalists who wrote in October 1998 about an ethnic Albanian boy named Besnik, 5, who witnessed his uncle being killed by Serbian police. The story was questioned because Kelley's description of Besnik's refusal to speak after his uncle's death didn't match earlier published accounts. London Telegraph reporter Julius Strauss, who wrote about Besnik before Kelley, says he and Kelley drove together to Besnik's house – and even split the cost of a bicycle for Besnik.

► On Nov. 20, 2001, Kelley and Jonathan Weisman, then a USA TODAY reporter, reported that as many as 1,600 U.S. Marines were preparing to join commandos in Afghanistan. The New York Times, Wall Street Journal and other papers published next-day stories that confirmed the account. Slate, an online magazine that had criticized the story, then credited USA TODAY with breaking it.

can we have a copy of the Shin Bet report? Please tell him you read it but cannot give him a copy because it is government property. Maybe make a joke like "we would all end up in jail if my colleagues found out I had given you the report."

where is Shapiro? Please tell him that all you can say is that he is not in Israel

3) why does David Wilder house arrest or are being watered by Island Tol rear

they may engage in violence against Palestinians or the Israeli government. 6) is there anything in Jack's story that is false? Please tell him that according to Shapiro, Jack's story is accurate. I think Shapiro wishes he hadn't invited Jack to join him. Please tell him that what Jack has written about happens quite often in

along Highway 60. The difference here is that Jack witnessed it. can someone from USA TODAY meet with you (David) if we come to Israel? Please tell him it would be impossible because of his current assignment. Maybe you could joke and say something like "when there's peace in Israel, we can all get together."

#### **Israel**

One document retrieved from Kelley's laptop is a primer to help a Jerusalem man vouch for a story published Sept. 4, 2001. The story was about a Jewish settler, Avi Shapiro. Kelley supposedly watched as Shapiro ordered settlers to shoot at a Palestinian taxi.

The document, above, was created by Kelley on July 18, 2003, weeks after USA TODAY's first examination began. "Abou Adam" is a salutation that means "father of Adam." It refers to a Jersusalem businessman whom Kelley knows and who has a son named Adam.
Kelley has identified the man only as "David" to edi-

tors and insists David is an officer with Shin Bet, Israel's domestic security force. Interviewed Thursday in Jerusalem, the man says he is not Shin Bet but refused to answer questions. He also insisted on talking with Kelley. The letter Kelley wrote outlines seven questions a

reporter at USA TODAY, Mark Memmott, "will probably ask you" to verify the story. Kelley provides the answer to each question (examples above).

During a subsequent phone conversation with

Memmott, the comments of "Abou Adam" were consis-

tent with the script. Even so, the newspaper traveled to Israel to try to find Shapiro. But in failing to find him, reporters learned that no detail of Shapiro's life — contained in the story or of-

fered by Kelley in interviews — could be verified. Israeli authorities say they have no record of an Avi Shapiro who fits the description Kelley offered. Hebron, where the settler community is close-knit, has no record either. Shin Bet looked into the alleged incident after Kelley's story and found it had no merit, says Daniel

Seaman, a government spokesman.

Israel's National Police, questioned by another news outlet about the incident just after Kelley's story, could find no record of a complaint either, even though Palestinians in the Hebron area logged about 250 other

complaints in the preceding nine months.

The Palestinian State Information Service also found no record of the incident. Shortly before Kelley's story, however, The Jerusalem Post reported Jewish terrorists were suspected of four shootings against Palestinians on area roads since mid-June.