

CHAPTER 2

The Past as Prologue

How, you may wonder, can I be certain that it was at precisely 1:17 a.m. that the full incongruity of what at that precise moment for the first time dawned on me although I had read Dahlin's publishers' puffery several weeks earlier?

From records I kept for an entirely different, a medical purpose, that's how.

Now I do not want to deceive. I do not yet and will not for a while report that fullness of that incongruity. In later chapters I do.

This reticence has nothing to do with what I was told about my first book, which was the first book on the Warren Report and on that Commission's work.

I was asked to submit three copies as entries in the 1966 mystery-writers' award. I'd never heard of it. I sent them to the address indicated, and later I was told, I no longer remember by whom, that my work of non-fiction, a serious work on a very serious subject, was a mystery-book award runner-up that year.

Since then I've heard no more of that year's contest or of the award itself.

Rather is my decision to hold back for the moment from the fear of confusing the reader with what is more of an ending than it is of a beginning.

I kept those records as a means of learning whether what I did in effort to cope with an illness of which I'd never heard in about 78 years and since have learned is not at all uncommon, "sleep apnea." I needed another illness like I needed another Lifton or another Livingstone!

"Apnea," I learned at one of the two hospitals with sleep-disturbance clinics at which I was a patient,

I do not remember which enlightened me, has a Greek origin. One who suffers sleep apnea spends what varies with the individual, part of his sleeping time not breathing at all.

It is treatable, in most patients, by relatively simple and safe surgery in the neck area, to remove the excess tissue that causes the interruption in breathing. That tissue is also what can cause snoring.

Or, if you snore, do rush out and see your doctor! It may save your life. If sleep apnea does not cause you to lose your life, correcting it can reduce the possibility of a stroke. Those who have sleep apnea have a higher incidence of strokes.

Sleep apnea is also treatable by medication. Three different doctors each prescribed a different medication for it. Fortunately, by then I had learned that some of us are well advised to check some of their prescriptions in such standard guides as The Physician's Desk Manual, as not one of these three doctors did.

When I reported the third- and I checked and took none of them- to my Johns Hopkins Hospital urologist, Dr. Charles Brendler, he exclaimed, "My god- that could have killed you."

The incidence of death from that and the other prescriptions among those who, as is not uncommon with men, have enlarged prostates may not be great but it sure as hell can be final!

So, between the sleep apnea and the consequences of an enlarged prostate, which gets men up frequently during the night to get to their bathrooms, I am awake often.

Because neither the surgery nor the medication is safe for me, I've been experimenting with the taking of another prescribed medication best known by its popular name, lasix.

It is furosemide and it is a diuretic.

At the time of that sudden vision I was trying to learn by keeping records whether delaying the time of taking the lasix until evening reduced the number of times I was awake. Mostly it is taken on arising.

But I figured if it emptied me more fully during the early night I might awaken fewer times. This experiment seems to yield some benefit.

The lasix is prescribed to reduce the danger of fluid accumulating in the tissue. And because the lasix kills the body's natural supply of potassium- don't risk that because it, too, can be fatal-a monitored (with me) dosage of chemical potassium is required.

Or, one damned thing leads to another.

Of which the foregoing is far from all.

I've been kept alive now for 18 years by rat poison.

Literally, cross my heart and all of that, I'm alive thanks to rat poison.

As are hundreds of thousands if not millions of other people with certain kinds of circulatory and blood problems. With me it began with my first venous thrombosis. That was diagnosed more than six months late at the so-called "health maintenance organization" of which my wife and I were among the first members of the first of them.

In its human-medicine form that rat poison is known as "coumadin."

But when it was first prescribed for me and given to me before that hospital discharged me the container in which it was bore the label "sodium warfarin."

When I farmed I learned about warfarin.

Yes, I farmed, beginning after the Truman election as the 1940s ended until I finally liquidated our farming almost three months to the day after John Kennedy was assassinated.

One of the first and most successful exploiters of the JFK assassination, Mark Lane, nee Marcus Levin, liked to make sneering reference to me as "that goose farmer." According to Jerry Ray, one of the two brothers of James Earl Ray, the accused assassin of Martin Luther King, Jr., Lane became a

Catholic. Jerry refers to Lane as "the holy man." Jerry says he has gone to midnight mass with Lane. More recently Lane has been publicly aligned with the right-wing political extremist and anti-Semite, Willis Carto. Carto, according to the *Washington Post* of Sunday, July 11, has become one of the strongest backers of the new anti-Semitism, denial of the Holocaust.

When we farmed raising geese was more of a hobby than an important part of our farming. We liked them.

The sneering was closer when it referred to me as "that chicken farmer."

That I was, but the sneerers, who are not infrequently also schnorers, stop there.

They do not ever say more, like that between us my wife and I, starting with the enormous asset of total ignorance- which meant we had none of the accumulated ignorance of the centuries to unlearn about poultry husbandry- won every first prize there was to win in national competitions ranging from raising to cooking chickens. Of the later category my wife was "The National Chicken Cooking Champion" of 1956.

And I was the "national barbecue king" of 1959.

Both cookoffs were judged by nationally-famous food editors none of whom knew or had any way of knowing whose dish they evaluated.

Anyway, farming was a business in which it paid to know about warfarin.

To me the warfarin story is one of the more beautiful stories of how life-saving medicines became known and available.

I'd learned about the using of natural medications, like the synthesis of natural raulfia root that was used successfully in India to treat high blood pressure. The large international drug house, Ciba, or Chemical Industries of Basle, through its amiable director of veterinary medicine by Dr. George Beloff,

asked me to use try it experimentally with chickens who were disturbed by frights.

And, as some readers will know, there are other natural treatments and cures for which in recent years drug manufacturers have been seeking with greater intensity.

Warfarin is what made D-Con famous. They first sold it as a rodenticide. It had the great merit of rats never getting bait-shy. Rats are smart. Until warfarin they learned to avoid most of the poisons set out to attract and kill them.

When warfarin was developed the scientists who synthesized it had not been looking for a rat poison.

They were trying to learn why cattle died when they eat sweet clover that had spoiled.

And do cattle ever love that spoiled sweet clover!

Wisconsin, a state in which dairying is a major industry, also enjoys a far-sighted Wisconsin (university) Alumni Research Foundation, abbreviated WARF. WARF decided to fund a research project designed to learn why that spoiled sweet clover was so loved by and so fatal to cattle. I learned about it in about the early 1950s. I do not remember when it was begun or when those so very successful Wisconsin researchers isolated the anticoagulant that killed all those cows. However, with WARF funding the study, it was only natural that this synthesized anticoagulant be called "warfarin."

Before it was available to manufacturers of generic drugs, the vast du Pont company, for one of the major shareholders of which I had worked as a reporter for several years, had warfarin's human-medicine rights.

And so since my first venous thrombosis in 1975 I have been kept alive by rat poison. It is a bit risky, and it invites childish jokes, but I'm here.

Or as one of the many FBI agents with whom I contended in more than decade of suing the FBI and

others under the Freedom of Information Act told my then lawyer and friend, Jim Lesar, "That old bastard ain't never gonna die. He's gonna be here forever to give us hell." I regret that the fabled FBI was a bit pessimistic, although I surely would love to prove it right.

From that warfarin for most of the 19 years I've been taking it, most of them at an extraordinarily high level and the rest at merely a high level, many problems can come. But my being kept alive is not a problem for me, if it was for others.

(A cardiologist whose care I once suffered told me "Your liver sure tears that warfarin up!" From that I deduced that it works on us through our livers.)

One of these potentially fatal side effects is that it can cause internal hemorrhaging.

My one experience with that impressed my family doctor so effectively when he looked at the urine specimen and said it was indistinguishable from pure blood, that in the more than a decade since then he'd had my blood's coagulation time tested three times a week.

From that he tells me how much coumadin to take. Because of the frequency of these blood tests additional internal hemorrhaging, which I neared several times, was successfully avoided.

What cannot be avoided, and this seems to vary with the patient and the dosage, is the easy of hemorrhaging from bumps. That doctor told me right off the bat that an accident another might not notice or in any auto accident that was of no consequence to others I could be killed.

He got my attention real quick, too.

As the years of my surviving on this wonderful rat poison accumulated, so also did the ease with which from the slightest contact with almost any surface caused visible and sometimes subcutaneous hemorrhaging.

Not long after my 1989 heart surgery- three bypasses and an astounding amount of metal in my

chest of which I did not learn later- my skin developed the undesirable habit of wanting to separate itself.

I no longer read large hardback books when I have to hold them. That is because when they slipped a triangle of forearm peeled back, an inch or more, varying with the size and weight of the book.

Two or three days before that sudden nocturnal vision about the utter incongruity of what impended as a "commemoration" of the JFK assassination, as I was walking a bit unsteadily out of my office, I bumped into the doorknob. Like most doorknobs, it is round, with a smooth surface. that time it peeled the outer layer of skin on my left forearm back in a single separation about two inches wide and not quite that long. That took a three-inch sterile pad to cover and keep clean. These not uncommon but slight injuries take about six weeks to heal.

I do not intend to make a catalogue of horrors of this and it in fact to me is no such thing. Like all the aches and pains and weaknesses and medical prohibitions that come with the years- I've been forbidden to lift more than 15 pounds since 1989- it is well worth it.

One need only consider the alternative.

When I tried to return to sleep after that revelation of 1:17 a.m., I was not able to. I dozed a bit, restless and apparently flailing my arms. Once I was awakened from a doze by a pain on the inside of my lower right forearm, just above the wrist. I had somehow rubbed it over my nose. When I finally decided that there would be no more real sleep and got up, there was blood all over that large spot that had rubbed across my nose. It took two one-inch bandaids to cover it.

So, while they are unusual, I do have a means of accurately pinpointing that vision that somehow came to me in my half-sleep.

I do not know how it is with other writers, but it has not been at all unusual for me to solve a writing

problem with my subconscious, to awaken with what I'd had trouble formulating clear in mind.

Starting the chapter of my first book on the murder of Dallas policeman J.D. (that is his name) Tippit, the man killed before Oswald was apprehended after JFK was killed, did not come to mind. I was worried about that and skipped that chapter in the rushed writing hoping to find what I could consider the correct way to start that chapter.

About two o'clock in the morning that cold winter's night, which was at most about two hours after I retired, there it was when I roused, clear as clear could be in my mind.

I rushed to my old Underwood upright typewriter, one of the models so dear to reporters of my generation, and under the chapter title, "The Tippit Murder," typed the first words that appear in that book unchanged: "If the Tippit murder had not happened, it would have had to have been invented. There is reason to believe that, in effect, it was."

I do not believe that Voltaire was in my mind when I retired. I can think of no reason why that French master should have been. And it was not for several years that I was reminded that he had been my unrecognized source. He had written, If religion did not exist it would have had to have been invented. I've not looked his exact words up. This representation of that one sentence is not unfaithful.

It happened again the night I finished the last chapter of my second book. On retiring, as it had for several weeks, I was groping for the formulation of a personal statement I wanted to add. It was a bitter, emotional personal statement too long to attempt to paraphrase or summarize here. But I do report that after 3,000 words of commentary on a number of things when I got to the state of the official archive in the National Archives as of about the middle of 1966 I began four consecutive paragraphs with these words to compare the official archive on this president's assassination with other government records of which I knew.

"Now if he were a boll-weevil rather than an assassinated President...

"Had he been a pig in interstate commerce...

"Were he but a piece of iron, a cotton fabric or an imitation geranium then our government would have the most astounding records; batteries of clerks, photocopy machines without end...

"But he was only a President, a man who captured the imagination of so many of our people and millions in the rest of the world, the man who had hoped to go miles in keeping his promises before he slept, the man who brought wit and intelligence to high places, who removed the curse from the word 'culture,' sought to reduce tensions, war and the fear of war in the world..."

Despite the profit and career benefits from the revisionism that was popular in some circles, including book publishing, with the advent of the Reagan and Bush years, that bitter and emotional formulation that came to me in my sleep remains both accurate today and an accurate reflection of what I feel and believe today as I did then.

Aware as I am of the ease with which those who have successfully exploited the JFK assassination from both sides, which in fact means both extremes, I owe the reader honesty and I state, well aware of the omnipresent ridicule of those who make careers and fame and sometimes not inconsiderable wealth by espousing the theories of both extremes, that as what within minutes of my unplanned rising at 1:17 a.m. the morning of June 27, 1993, what was then in my mind grew into the formulation of this book. In confession it be then I confess that I had had the same experiences earlier and they were what I then and since regard as the correct and proper formulations.

Before daylight, after I was well into the beginning of this rough draft, it also came to me that some years ago I rejected the idea that I write a book more or less how this one begins.

A dear friend of my youth kept after me to write an autobiography. He even offered to pay the cost

of publishing it.

I declined, telling him I do not have that kind of ego.

I was not engaged in any extensive writing then. That was because of the severe limitations imposed upon me by other medical problems I've survived.

Standing still has been prohibited, by which I mean by my doctors, since the first of two emergency operations after a Teflon artery was implanted in my left thigh to replace the blocked femoral artery. The second of the operations to clear the blockages in the artificial artery I was not expected to survive. The first was at the time of the successful implant, in September and October, 1980. The second was the following April.

Not being able to stand still for any length of time means that my ability to use my own files was and is severely limited.

It was further limited in my ability to use stairs when most of my files, all those records I obtained by quite a few long-lasting FOIA suits, are in our basement, the only place in the house we can hold them. (We have about 60 file cabinets of records.)

During that period the poor vision with which I was born was further impaired by the ripening of the cataracts that had developed on both eyes. I had the cataract removed from the better eye in the first of many, many wonderful experiences at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. Its excellent reputation is not exaggerated and cannot be from my experiences there and with its hospital/teaching staff.

No macho, either! No doctor turf concepts. Either can be adverse to the patient's interest, as I've learned and would prefer not to recall.

As soon as the director of the corneal service of that hospital's world-famous Wilmer Eye Institute learned that I live on coumadin he said, "I have to refer you to Dr. Bell." When Dr. William Bell, who

introduced himself by phone saying, "This is Bill Bell," learned my medical history he told me that when I checked in to be certain that I was registered as on his service.

He is the chief of hematology, but that title does not appear on his letterheads, his letters or even on his office door. He has never referred to himself in speaking to me as "doctor." Behind his back the interns and residents refer to him, intending the most sincere respect by it, as "the guru."

I had an eye operation without ever being registered as or a patient in that world famous eye hospital.

I was Dr. Bell's hematology patient.

What is ordinarily simple out-patient surgery had me hospitalized for five days, that was to control and monitor the reduced anticoagulation before the operation and to gradually restore it to the desired level after the operation.

The four months during which I was not permitted to drive my car did weaken me some because from the time of the first of the complications following the 1980 arterial surgery I was on a mall-walking program, a program that has since become very popular among senior citizens, their doctors and most of the malls that invited us.

Not long before that first of my four Johns Hopkins hospitalizations and innumerable visits for consultations that also ensued, locally I had the prostate surgery that is known as trans-urethral resection or TURP. The local plumber who I later learned had a Mexican medical degree knew better than the doctors who had me on the anticoagulant and monitored the dosage so carefully. He took me off it for eight days and would have had me off of it for four weeks, what could have been fatal, if he had not already visited additional venous thromboses on me. Fortunately I recognized the symptoms and the local cardiologist arranged for the in-home injection of the short-lived anticoagulant heparin for three

weeks. During that time I was to sit with my legs elevated and not to move around except for real need, like using the bathroom.

That operation, also usually outpatient surgery, also had be hospitalized for five days. When it was considered safe for me to return to taking coumadin I was confided to our home for an additional three months by my doctors. Outpatient surgery?

This lack of any real physical activity also weakened me more. I was not able to walk nearly as well or as much and walking was the one real exercise I was not more or less denied by my doctors.

So, when my dear friend Joe Labovsky, wanted me to write an autobiography not only was I uncomfortable with the very idea, never having had that kind of ego, it also was not possible for me to consult and use the many relevant records in our basement.

When through the kindness of another dear friend, Richard Gallen, I had part-time help from young women who were students at local Hood College, where all my records will be a permanent public archive, I still did not give any thought to my friend Joe's proposition.

What he had in mind is not the way I begin this book but did include it.

Joe is one of the two surviving of my dearest friends of that part of my youth whose separation began not long after our educations at different colleges.

Until recent years the last time we were together more than briefly was when he invited me to spend a week with him and the other owner of a fine Chesapeake-type, 38-foot cabin cruiser, a very seaworthy boat that could and did safely accommodate a large number of his friends on its broad covered after-deck. It could sleep four in bunks in its cabin. When I got badly sunburned almost as soon as we set forth on that sail I slept where it was cooler, on the wooden cover of the hatch that ran the entire width of the stern. That boat was so wide there, after its narrowing, that I did not come near

to touching either side.

The boat was named and registered as the "Virginia." Joe and his dentist friend and co-owner, Dr. Sam Sosnov, called her the "C. Phyllis."

That week of the summer of 1935 is the last real vacation I've had. All other vacation periods either I worked or could not afford a vacation.

When I farmed and delivered our own produce personally I also could not take any vacation. Once when I had mononucleosis and my doctor told me I could be up and about again after three weeks I did not miss a day of tending chickens, preparing them for cooking and delivering them.

I was still pretty strong physically in those days.

In retrospect I suppose the hardships of the Great Depression and some of its privations prepared the youth of that era for some of the rigors and problems of adulthood more than subsequent generations were prepared for it.

Why, it may be wondered, when I refused to write an autobiography do I begin this book autobiographically? There are several reasons.

What is autobiographical is intended to recall and report some of my life and my learning experiences of my 80 years that I believe helped prepare me for the work I have done on the political assassinations, a preparation that cannot be acquired through formal education.

I also intend to give readers an opportunity to size me up, to have some basis for opinions on what kind of person I am, what made me that way, and something about my beliefs.

What kind of man persists, when broke, in debt and without income of any kind, persists in publishing the first book on the Warren Commission himself when more than 100 publishers rejected it,

some later confessing fear as their reason, and makes a success of it?

When he has no income, no influence, files all the lawsuits he did to force the government to give him records relating to the assassinations that it had suppressed? Persisted in this litigation with illness not uncommonly fatal?

Persists, too, in publishing still more books on the assassination when he cannot pay the printer and finds ways of doing that?

And, after getting a third of a million pages of those once-withheld records, made them freely available to all his book-writing competitors and then, refusing to sell this vast archive, gave it with no quid pro quo to the college that will make it forever available to all who want to use it after he is no longer able to do that?

Writes his eighth book when he is 79, frail and feeble, and is past 80 when he begins this one, only to lay it aside and complete a different book as his ninth? And despite his weakness, produces manuscripts in the two completed books of almost a half-million words? Before returning to this book which by then was of about a hundred thousand words.

Is he just a stubborn old cuss or is he a man determined to make and leave for our history as much of a dependable record as is possible for him about those great national tragedies and how the basic institutions of our society functioned or failed to function in those times of great stress and ever since then?

In making a record for history one never knows whether or not it will ever be used. But without the making of such a record, there is nothing to be consulted in the future other than the works he addresses in this book, what he regards as seriously flawed and thus corrupting of that history.

The history that changed so radically in the ensuing years.

In what is autobiographical I have omitted much of what most writers and readers like, the anecdotal. My purposes do not include writing a real autobiography. They are what I represent them to be in different ways and degrees what prepared me for the work I have done.

The lives we lead and our experiences in our lives have much to do with the kind of persons we become, how we think and approach problems, what we tend to believe and like, what we do not like and tend to avoid, whether we develop principles, standards, beliefs, attitudes and prejudices and what they are and perhaps why we developed them.

Although it was not in my mind when I began writing, I also believe, in retrospect, that the many thousands who read my earlier books and the more than 20,000 strangers who wrote me over the years may find some of it interesting.

I do believe that the learning experiences I report were invaluable as a preparation for the work I have done, however the reader may evaluate that work. I believe also that without some of those experiences I would not have been able to accomplish much of what I think I have accomplished. That I hope to prepare each reader to decide personally.