

To Charles Kuhn, Librarian, Hood College from Harold Weisberg 2/18/91

Penn Jones, his "Forgive my Grief" books and his "The Continuing Inquiry" newsletter,

Of the numerous newsletter by those interested in the JFK assassination, to none of which I subscribed, I believe that Jones's was the first. There may be more than the three volumes of his books, which consist of reprints of his editorials in his minuscule weekly, "The Midlothian Mirror," but if so I do not have it.

Most of the so-called "critics" are or were fakey in varying degrees. My first impression of Penn when I first met him was that he was paranoid. Almost the first words he spoke to me are "They are going to kill us all!"

His nuttiness and irresponsibility on the JFK assassination are quite the opposite of his record on state and local issues. His plant and office appear to have been bombed at least once. I am not certain that the explosion(s) were not accidents but it was widely believed that he was bombed over his forthright position on those issues. For the other side of his life, as editor and publisher of a weekly with a circulation of less than 1,000, he received the Elisha Lovejoy award.

After he sold the paper, which may have been prompted by his wife's refusal to subsidize it any longer, he started the newsletter.

He told me when we first met, when we both appeared on Metromedia's later syndicated "The Minority Apart" TV show (a result of the supersensational talk show I did when they had me boobytrapped with four erudite lawyers in the audience to ruin me, with FBI connivance on which over a period as I recall of two hours, in which I did them all in) that the income from his wife's inheritance kept them going. (See my WMEW-TV files.)

He was sincere, believed all the nonsense he published and spoke, and got his first major attention when Ramparts magazine sort of adopted him in a major article and then took him on a speaking tour, with the late Izzy Stone's brother Mark handling the public relations and at least in Washington accompanied Penn. That led to innumerable appearances all around the country on radio and TV talk shows. Especially because of his friendly and genial Texas country-boy manner he became almost a folk hero.

Of the many mythologies he started the most enduring as well as the most baseless was his "mysterious deaths" that grew rapidly from about a dozen to a large number. This nonsense took hold internationally. When the Times of London asked me to write about it I refused and then made the mistake of saying that the subject was his baby. So they got him to write it, ~~which~~ submitted his article to Lloyd's of London, and it evolved some fantastic statistics about the improbability of it being accidental deaths. So much for statistics!

There is nothing to the business. "One of the deaths was in any way mysterious and most had no connection with the assassination or its investigations at all. One, for example, was of the live-in lover or husband (or both) of a former Ruby stripped. The one that seems to have attracted most attention is that of the cab driver, William Whaley,

and it is a fact that he was the first cab driver to die on what Jones called "active duty" in 37 years. However, there was, with Whaley as with all the few others who were involved in the investigations, ^{there was} not a thing he could have said that he hadn't and in fact, in his own words, he was so terrible a witness he feared that he had wrecked the Warren investigation. (See my first "hitewash book on this.) The conditions of his death, as I got scant attention in reporting, eliminate any possibility that he was killed by the CIA to close his mouth. Which had already uttered enough to make the Commission look ridiculous. He was killed in a head-on collision with a car driven by a man 82 years old who was driving the wrong way on a divided highway.

People used to laugh when I concluded ~~with~~ this account, "I've never heard of the CIA having any 82 year old kamikazies" but the myth lingered.

Penn was so unquestioningly devoted to Garrison, who went for all Penn's nonsense and non-existing witnesses that when I aborted one of Garrison's most outrageous and irresponsible plans, to commemorate the fifth assassination anniversary with additional conspiracy charges, including of a man who'd killed himself a year before the assassination. Penn in his paper denounced me as a CIA agent dispatched to ruin Garrison! He believed this quite sincerely and as a result refused to pay me about \$250 he owed me. However, his then wife, a fine woman known by ~~her~~ her initials, A I or something with a beginning A, insisted that they drove to Dallas when I was there and hand me the check. (Numerous Garrison memos in files.) ^(30 miles)

He is not at all unusual in being an intelligent, personable and principled person who was both rabid and nutty on this one subject.

When his wife could ~~not~~ stand it no longer, and she was Griselda reincarnated, she put him out, they separated or were divorced, and last I heard he was living with a woman so young she could have been his daughter, if not his grand-daughter, who was devoted to his beliefs if not also to him, in Waxahatchie, Texas.

The last public attention he got of which I am aware was when he was openly ridiculed on network TV (as news) demonstrating the absolutely impossible, how JFK was killed from a sewer inlet on Elm Street.

He is one of the to me many tragedies in the wake of that assassination. Without exception they were all conspiracy theorists for whom nothing was too wild, too impossible.

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