

12/23/71

Mr. George McMillan
12 Hilliard St.,
Cambridge, Mass. 02138

Dear George,

This is the "Ho-ho" season, so a big "ho-ho" to you. After all these years.

I've been hearing strange things about you, things I'd never have believed years ago. Like how you gobbled up the fanciful tales Jerry Ray told you about what he said I said. If you are ever down this way I'll be glad to show you what I did say. You'll recognize it as little as I will your accounting of what happened in Memphis, if and when it is out.

I say "if" because I wonder what kind of book you'll have when you can't connect Ray with the crime. (I understand you were a friend of the victim.) If your book does appear, I do believe you'll regret your publisher didn't have Harper's foresight. They didn't wait for liberalized abortion to end the literary abortion with which you almost had to live.

Money can be so attractive to a writer. And so great a torment once he takes it. Especially if he begins with: "a very happy contract"; reprint contracts in eight other countries; and a preconception that alone can lead to such sweets.

Of course, there is overpowering logic, too: "I have always believed that James Earl Ray did it alone. This guy is a loner. And I have never investigated any aspect of a conspiracy, which has left me free to work on his biography." With science to help logic, too, a real shrink for psychological "interpretation" of "Things like what does it do to a guy to sleep in the same bed with his parents when he is growing up."

You pay money for that? Shucks, George, the Warren Commission said all you have to know about that. If you didn't know that one of the answers is he learns early.

I've come to understand why your book didn't appear as originally scheduled, four months after the minitrial.

What I can't understand is how the fellow I once knew could con himself into the position in which you now are.

Not even the newer samples of your logic, like saying a book that demolishes the case against Ray makes his "case" sound "fisky", but your "good, serious, permanent book", the one "people will be reading 50 years from now", by calling him a "Nazi," can only help you." With "help" like that, who needs enemies?

I suppose it is because my work is "fishy" that Foreman fled a TV studio with part of his makeup on when he learned he was to confront me - and this after he had read my book. Naturally such content is "so bad it hurts" Ray. Elementary.

Thus also can I understand that to the holder of "a very happy contract" (do you still consider your choice of words appropriate?) I must be "vicious", the description Jerry attributes to you. I spent several days with him last month.

I don't take offense. After all, didn't Hue call me a "racist"? And the (largely black) studio audience also "racist" when they laughed. Of course, in feeding all that loot to Hanes, Hue wasn't racist, was he?

Hue wasn't "happy", nor was his travelling companion, Gerold Frank, nor his other associate in the intended gangup, Judge Dwyer.

But you be happy, ~~Geweg~~, in letting Jerry con you, in your contract and all that moola, and in everything you do. I don't think you'll be happy after your book is out. If it is, that is.

Until then, I'll be looking forward to the "Portrait of an Assassin" who didn't assassinate. That surely will be the book that was!

For the record, Ray didn't "cooperate" with me on the book. We had no contact at all. I wrote him through Canale, who neither forwarded the letter nor returned it. Ray's lawyer gave him a set of proofs to read. It was a complete (and not unpleasant) surprise when he volunteered the postscript that appears, with the stipulation that I say that he did it without compensation. After publication I checked out one of the leads in it. You might want to. It stacks up. But if leaving your shrink for that long will bother you, I'll be glad to tell you the result. That I found it interesting is no assurance you will. It certainly won't stimulate confidence in either the official prosecution or the FBI.

After this consideration of your logic, I suppose I ought not let it rest on an offer to show you what I really wrote Jerry. Accept it or not, what I did say is that your first wife must have loved you, for she gave up an inheritance to marry you (and I did not say that you married her for money, something I didn't ever consider and do not today believe); that she was a beautiful person; that you seemed to me to be a nice guy of decent principle; and that you lived in the kookiest house in Washington. Now, should you have the interest to see if I am as big a liar as I am vicious, you can still see that letter.

And so, until 1972, when a bigger one would, I think, be in order, a "happy" Ho-ho to you!

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg