

Dear Howard Retchin,

3/24/79

The man who does not get discouraged is sick. The man who permits discouragement to dominate, to make him quit, is lost.

From the past 15 years along - and I've lived five decades longer than that - I could add much to your list of causes for discouragement and dismay. But I could give you a very considerable list of entirely different nature. Please understand I do not have the time. (And with this please also forgive the typos)

Perfection is not a state of man. We suffer the flaws preached against in biblical days. Indeed, those who then preached had their own flaws.

As you understand, my work addresses the functioning of our basic institutions. They all failed in time of great stress and as you note with the House committee, since then have also failed.

Because I do not sensationalize to be exciting and attractive to relatively immature young adult minds I do not get many requests for lectures at colleges. But when I do I am honest, I do paint the kind of picture you see, but I do not stop there. For this is not a world in which there is no hope, no progress. And while I delineate what you make what it can be, a dismal situation, I try to show that it really isn't. As two examples, and although I was on my way to the hospital with serious illness when I got Post Mortem to the printer, since then I have obtained about 200,000 previously secret pages of official records. I won't kid you and say it was easy. It wasn't. But it was possible. And there will be more. These will always be available now to your generation and to those that follow, for whatever uses you can find. As I wind up the question period after speaking, can you think of a country - not only now but ever in man's history - where I could have done what I now do? In even the land of the Magna Carta there is an official secrets act. For all its freedoms Canada has the same restrictions.

You say we won't survive as a free land for another 200 years. I think we can and I live and work on the basic assumption it is possible and more than worth the struggle.

Governments tend to be authoritarian, whether of the right or the left or between. Those of authoritarian power and predisposition tend to perpetuate themselves and their beliefs. In our land they are not the majority. It also isn't true that after the 60s those of the college generation found going easier on the smooth road that has no high peaks and no deep valleys. Most, but by no means all.

History and faith in humankind provide comfort and reassurance. From Bruce and his depression before the fireplace while the spider persisted in seeking to spin a web to Washington at Valley Forge to now, when men are not jailed for 25 years for stealing a 7¢ loaf of bread to feed their kids, as they were in the Great Depression. For all our present failings the hungry, for the most part, are fed. Those ghetto kids who have what it takes can and do escape the ghetto.

We are the people of Zenger, who established a since corrupted press freedom; or Paine who was not overwhelmed by the times that try men's souls; of Thoreau who asked Emerson what he was doing out of jail; and of the citizens' army that helped end the worst tyranny of modern times when I was your age - and with a clear history of pacifism enlisted.

There will never be a time when there will not be those who won't cop out when you show your peers what you report. But we are also the people, of the Jackson who said that one determined man can become a majority.

The future of freedom lies in the hands, the hearts and the souls of the countless Howard Retchins whose souls are tried but who are not summer soldiers; who will go to jail if need be (and as helped turn the country around in the 60s), which is extremely rare; who understand the effort is worthwhile and will make what effort they can and not be emasculated by discouragement; who think through and realize the alternative permits no

alternative for those who care about freedom and want it for themselves, their families and their fellow men; and who I assure you from long, costly and painful experience will come to a point in their lives when they can look back and be more than content from the realization that to the degree life and its responsibilities and the varying capabilities of each permitted have done what they could to make this a better land, a better world and no matter how small the contribution see it was a constructive contribution to freedom.

I illustrate that I am not Pollyanna and am not putting you on with a personal story, one I never tell. I make the exception because of the tone as well as the words of your letter.

This past week I was before the federal court of appeals for about the fifth time with a single suit, for the results of the spectrographic and neutron activation analyses in the HFK case. My first request of the FBI, which followed inquiry at the Archives, was on May 23, 1966. In the first suit I lost all the way to the Supreme Court. Here I am, nobody, really. Broke and in debt. Initially with an ineffectual lawyer. But then a bright young man who had not yet taken his bar examinations just happened to turn it. His briefing was excellent, if it did not impress the Supreme Court. It did impress the Congress, which from this amended the investigatory files exemption of the Freedom of Information Act and then overrode Gerald Ford's veto. One of the results is the fairly full exposure of some of the greatest dangers to freedom, the enormous domestic intelligence operations of those of the dedicated wrong. From this there is the virtual end of that great danger to freedom and individual rights.

Still broke and still in debt I refiled the case as the first case under the amended FOIA Act, in 1974. It went to court early in 1975. Since then it has been to the appeals court two more times. I think it is now on its way back to district court, where the fight will begin all over again.

Faced with all this adversity and despite serious limitations that in early 1975 included serious illness I have nonetheless built what I believe is an important historical record. Pardon the avuncular, but this was possible by what I think of as intellectual judo. It was made possible by official dishonesties that extended to the judge, a partisan.

There is no way I can now lose this case. No way I can avoid the belief that I have done something worthwhile, if at great cost, especially in time. Whatever the ultimate judicial decision I have won - for everyone else.

I use this as illustration, to show that each Howard Ketchin in his own way can see and do his part and find that whatever the end may be he is rewarded, has done well with his time on earth and maybe, just maybe, has done more.

It is worth the effort. I've lived it and know.

But it all begins with understanding and with faith. Nothing is impossible save for those who fear. Fear is the most corrosive of emotions.

Confusion and discouragement are natural, part of life. If you do not let dismay dominate you, as it need not and should not, they will pass and you will see clearly that there is hope, that it requires effort, that the effort, if not always easy, is its own reward, and that there are others who are, feel and do the same way.

If as a political scientist you can turn on just one who makes a successful effort to make some improvement then you will have done well and it will be worth all the lows in life, like the one in which you now are.

Look backward only to learn. Look ahead and you will go ahead. And many others with you.

There is cause for concern. But not for dismay or hopelessness.

If I did not from my own experience believe this I would not take the time to try to persuade you, to encourage you.

If I ever get a lecture invitation near there I'll try to remember to let you know so

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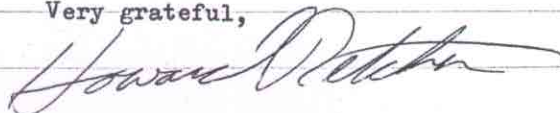
Dear Mr. Weisberg,

Having read Post Mortem over and over for the past several years I am still quite discouraged. Why in the hell are the people of this nation so naive? Constantly we hear about the communist threat and yet the conspiracy within our own country is far worse. I am a political scientist student. Whenever I confront others with these documents they call me paranoid and deranged! Boy am I confused.

You have devoted years of your life to this work which I am quite sure has not been profitable. And then a Senate Committee comes along and says that Kennedy probably was killed by conspirators because they have a tape that proves more than three gunshots were fired. Yet, there is much more conclusive evidence to prove that fact. Wow!

I guess that our nation will not survive as a free state for another two hundred years. Why, I do not understand. I feel so impotent and irrelevant to what occurs within our society. I had to finally write you because so few understand the way I feel. Let me praise you and your constituents for this devotion of real patriotism. You are a symbol of human awareness which is lacking in the world today. Going back, I can see that President Kennedy defied the CIA and then died. We are now all slowly regressing into death. It sure is heavy on the mind yet so real. Of course I nor you (that I know of) know who killed the President. But in the end it is really you and me.

Very grateful,



Quin,

You've heard me say that the government is tearing its young people up.

Fewer reflect it now but too many still do.

Because this one appears to be more confused and depressed I've taken more time than I would have.

It is not the fact of the assassinations.

It is disenchantment with government in their wake.

It turns the most promising, the most sensitive and concerned young people off.

And it lets authoritarianism move ahead more easily.

HW 3/24/79