

AROUND THE VALLEY / BY AARON CURTISS

Singles Eschew 'What's Your Sign?'

With the exception of the Weekly World News, it is generally agreed that John F. Kennedy is dead. No one really believes the King of Camelot is pulling shifts as a Safeway night manager somewhere in suburban Sioux Falls, sharing an apartment with Elvis.

The world has seen Kennedy die on film over 5.6 seconds at 12:30 p.m. in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963. And the world watched Jackie and John-John weeping and saluting a few days later in electronic images fused forever into the minds of millions.

But that's where agreement ends and The Debate, raging rabidly for nearly 30 years, begins. The exact details of what happened that sunny Texas afternoon may never be known, but Socially Responsible Singles convened a recent meeting under the vaulting dome of the Unitarian Universalist Society in Sepulveda—er, North Hills—to sort it all out anyway.

SRS is a collection of single folks—married couples are invited, too—who spend two Friday nights a month chatting about Really Important Topics like sexual harassment in the workplace, the future of Los Angeles, safe sex and the fate of the world in general—a cerebral alternative to the average smoke-filled, Lycra-clad, big-hair meet market.

Meetings generally draw 20 to 80 people, but this one on the Kennedy assassination—prompted by the movie "JFK"—attracted about 200. With so many newcomers in the crowd, the most oft-asked question among the participants was not about bullet trajectories or clouds of smoke on the grassy knoll, but simply: "Have you ever been to one of these things?"

Before group leader John Johnson introduced the



evening's keynote speaker, assassination theorist Robert Dorff, he exhorted: "Our economy and our country itself is being stolen."

Heads nodded in agreement.

Many in the crowd had seen Oliver Stone's movie and believed wholeheartedly his assertion that everybody—the CIA, the Cubans, the military, the press and Aunt Opal from Topeka—had a hand in offing the President, a chain of conspirators looping exponentially skyward from a high school dropout pinko patsy to the highest echelons of Power.

So Dorff's presentation was more like a Sunday School catechism than an open forum of ideas. That J.F.K. died at the hands of many still-unknown plotters was as indisputable as the Pope being Polish. Those in attendance listened attentively as Dorff, a heavy-machinery auctioneer, attempted to sift reason from an unreasonable world, where cataclysmic circumstances often unfold from isolated incidents.

for 'Who Killed J.F.K.?'

Sometimes, to paraphrase, it happens.

One dissenter who took issue with Dorff's theories was summarily cut off as he delved into the minutiae of how many bullets were recovered. He began: "According to my understanding. . ."

"Your understanding is incorrect," Dorff snapped, sending the heretic skulking back to his seat shrugging his shoulders.

Another disbeliever later took his place at the microphone and asked Dorff how—in the face of a government investigation that pored over thousands of interviews, photos and bits of evidence—he could not be satisfied with the version of events taught in high school history classes.

"Any evidence handled by the federal government is not evidence, and I don't believe it," Dorff said.

Dorff doesn't know exactly how the President was killed, who was involved or why they did it. What he knows is that it didn't happen the way it's been taught. He can't believe that Lee Harvey Oswald, a flake and a bad shot to boot, could kill Kennedy.

Someone else, something larger and more sinister, snatched away the American innocence that sunny afternoon.

"He seemed like the good-guy President, the white knight for truth and freedom and the American Way and all that stuff," said Hilary C. Martick, who said she is a law school graduate who works as a secretary. On the side, she refers singles to ballroom dancing galas.

Martick was 10 years old, walking home uphill from grammar school in Baltimore, when she was told by a friend's mother that the President was dead. As she grew up, she never really bought the Warren Commission line. Nothing she could put a

finger on, she said, just a lingering doubt.

"There's no way," she said of the commission's conclusion that Oswald acted alone. "It's all too coincidental."

Exactly right, according to Jack Kimbrough, a 65-year-old who studies the assassination full time. A Santa Claus look-alike, Kimbrough rambled on about the spray of Kennedy's "bone plate and brain matter" and the explosive qualities of temporal cavities when smashed by a bullet.

The assassination, according to Kimbrough, was orchestrated by the "de facto government," the unseen power structure he figures really runs the country, and always has. "Democracy has been overturned in this country," said Kimbrough, who has at home—and offers to show to all interested—a copy of the film shot by Abraham Zapruder, which he interprets as showing Kennedy being hit from all sides.

"That 16 seconds of film is worth all the volumes that have been written."

Nevertheless, Kimbrough has added his own writing to the volumes. He wrote a song in 1968 to the tune of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic."

Our President is lying up there cold beneath his flame.

He is calling out for vengeance and to do so in his name,

To keep the peace forever and erase our nation's shame

His dream goes marching on.

"This is not a profession," Kimbrough added flatly. "This is an obsession. I'm a fanatic."

Aaron Curtiss is a Times staff writer.