

January, 1992

Dear Jerry McKnight,

To Harold
re: His file

Thank you for the kind words about my piece on Harold Weisberg. If, indeed, the story was well done, it was due to the kind patience of Harold, David Wrona and yourself - I don't know many busy people who willingly take hours out of their Sunday afternoons to educate and enlighten an unknown writer.

I was a 10-year-old 4th grader on November 22, 1963. I remember standing outside for hours, in the bitter, dark cold, with my mother and brother, waiting for our turn to walk past JFK's coffin in the rotunda. We never made it... The cold got us

first. I felt frozen to the concrete that night but never complained to my mother - I knew how much being there meant to her.

What I know now, 28 years later, is as disturbing to me as the tears my mother shed that November. But I'm glad I know. I want to know more. Through the efforts of Harold Weisberg and men like him, I'm sure I will. Thanks so much for your fine help.

Regards,

Webbie Weiss

1992 Bridal
Guide

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JFK

A Frederick Man's
25-Year Search
For Truth

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Compiling A Record For History

JFK AND ONE MAN'S SEARCH FOR TRUTH

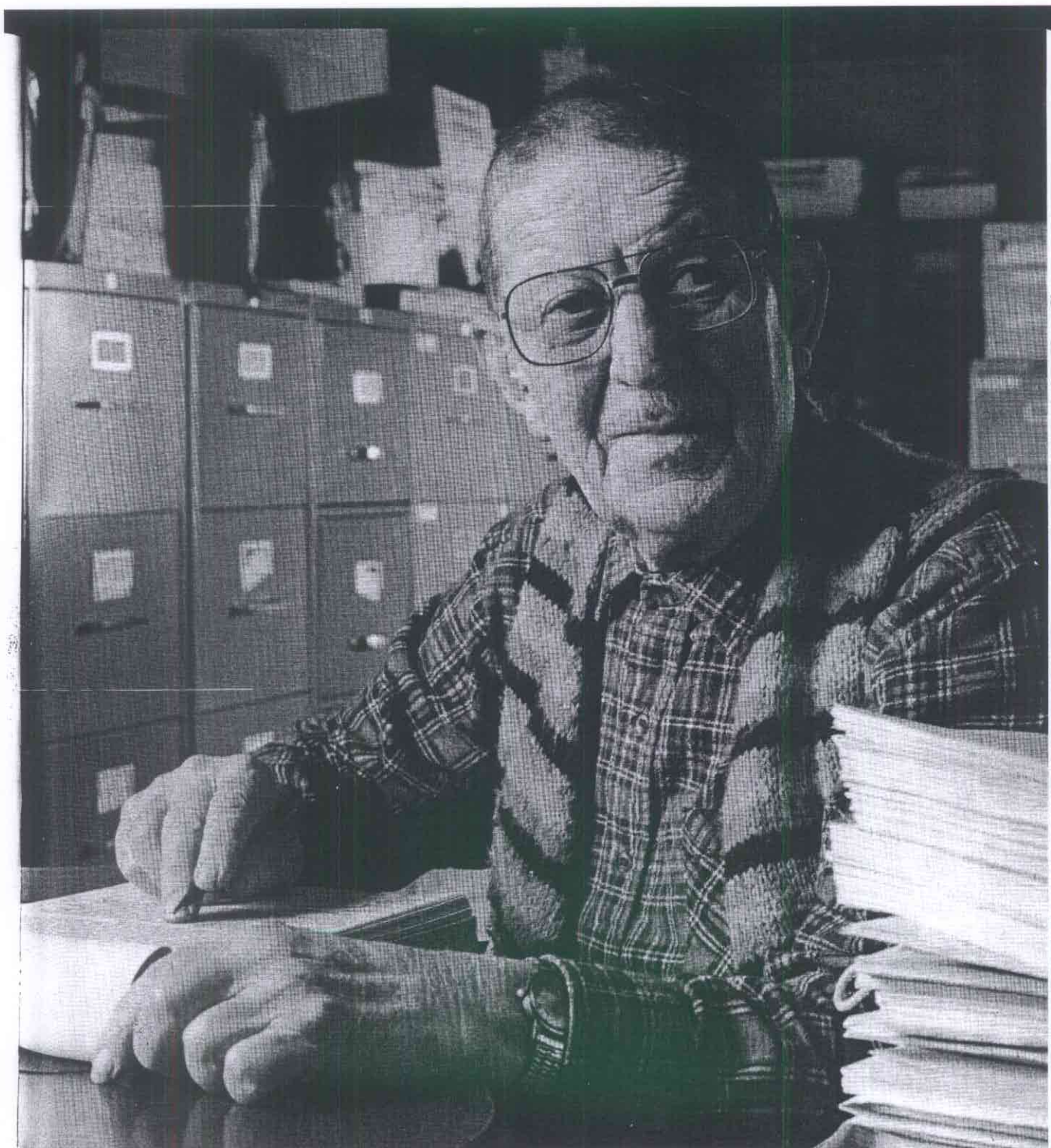
By Deborah M. Wiles

Photos by Dennis Crews

His gait is unsteady, but his handshake is firm. He is unassuming in old forest green slacks and a plaid flannel shirt. He wears hearing aids in both ears and sits at the restaurant table with his foot wrapped and elevated, to improve his circulation. His hands are large and rough, and he uses them to talk broadly. He orders Bushmills on the rocks — after making sure the brew is bottled in Ireland and not domestically distilled. Next, he bums two Camels from the waiter (who slips him four more as we talk). Now he is ready.

He is very direct. No nonsense. No hysterics. But he is angry. Frustrated. Much of his adult life he has struggled to bring the truth out in the open, and now, he says, another man — Oliver Stone — is spending \$40 million to push an inflammatory and utterly incorrect film version of our country's greatest modern-day tragedy. He's mad at Oliver Stone, and Stone knows it.

The man is Harold Weisberg. According to those who should know, Weisberg, age 78, resident of Frederick County, Md., former intelligence analyst, Senate investigator and editor, and poultry farmer, knows more about the assassination of John F. Kennedy than any other living human being.



Hood College history professor Jerry McKnight, 59, teaches a course titled "The Politics of Assassination" and is Hood's recognized expert on assassinations. Says he: "This [Kennedy assassination] field is full of nuts and theorizers and publicity hounds, but Harold Weis-

berg isn't one of them. He doesn't theorize, he presents the facts. He and his wife, Lil (who edited and expertly indexed Weisberg's books), have done more than any other researchers, through the Freedom of Information Act, to bring to light the fact that the United States Govern-

ment never investigated — or intended to investigate — the assassination of John Kennedy."

Colleague David Wrone, history professor at the University of Wisconsin at Stephen's Point agrees. "Harold Weisberg is one of the finest minds I've ever

mer . . . and this is a careful judgment. He is an excellent judge of character and motive. Just look at the incredible odds against which he fought to obtain the records he has."

Records. Over 250,000 documents on the Kennedy assassination (and another 80,000 on the Martin Luther King Jr. assassination) sit neatly catalogued and indexed in 68 four-drawer file cabinets in Harold Weisberg's home at the foot of Gambrill Mountain. He has provided free and open access to these documents, mostly FBI papers he has obtained through Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuits, to the BBC, Canadian television, authors throughout the United States and Europe, students and interested citizens. He has gathered these papers at his own expense and has written and published seven books on the Kennedy assassination, throwing himself into debt and breaking his health. Why? Why would one man be so determined? Weisberg's answer: "I'm thinking about the integrity of our society."

Born in Philadelphia in 1913, Weisberg spent part of World War II as an intelligence analyst for the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor to the CIA. After various jobs in Washington, D.C., including investigator and editor of the Senate Civil Liberties Committee, Washington correspondent for *Clique Magazine* and traffic manager for "the only good music station in Washington — WQQW, now WGMS," Weisberg and wife Lillian moved to what was then the country, upper Montgomery County, Md. They owned and managed a successful poultry operation on land that is now Little Bennett Regional Park. The British Embassy, John Foster Dulles and Chez Francois, among others, ordered their holiday geese from the Weisberg farm, Coq D'Or.

Each Easter, Weisberg arranged for the Civil Air patrol to fly dozens of Coq D'Or's hard-boiled goose eggs to Kernan's Children's Hospital in Baltimore; he hand delivered dozens more to Children's Hospital in the District. He sought to enlighten: sick children needed an Easter-egg hunt as much — or more — than those who were well. He is remembered in Washington Peace Corps circles for his Geese for Peace program, in which he proposed the Peace Corps supply geese to poorer countries as a way of teaching subsistence living; he donated a breeding flock of 25 white China geese to get the program started.

Weisberg was gathering eggs in the east pen of the hen house, "moving from the second bank of nests to the third" when he heard on his transistor radio that Kennedy had been shot: "I finished gathering eggs as fast as I could and got back to the house."

"At first, I was shocked, like everyone else. After they mentioned Oswald's name, I was shocked for a different reason: All this evidence was just given to the world on every street corner; how could they ever impanel an impartial jury? How could the man get a fair trial? But the

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thing that really turned me on [to the assassination] was the refusal of the press to consider anything other than the government's story. At the time, I believed Lee Harvey Oswald could not have been persona non grata to the FBI, and was determined to write about it. No agent would touch it."

He samples the restaurant's minestrone and speaks in a rich, rapid staccato peppered with names, dates, figures. He jumps back and forth in time but never rambles; he is right on target. "You must understand," he says, palms turned upward in supplication, "the assassination of a president nullifies a whole system of society. It has the effect of a coup d'etat. It is important for us as a nation to find out everything we can that we don't know."

Weisberg's interest turned into a life's work that earned him the dubious honor

of being on a first-name basis with government lawyers who were fighting his FOIA lawsuits. His name became well known in assassination-investigation circles, especially after the 1966 re-publication of his first book, *White Wash: The Report on the Warren Report*, a critical examination of the Warren Commission report. When Jim Garrison, then New Orleans district attorney, asked Weisberg to appear before the Grand Jury in 1967, he agreed.

"I had more faith in Garrison than I should have," he says. We [who disagreed with the Warren Commission Report] all did. Here was a public official agreeing with us that there had to be some other explanation. His offer was exciting, attractive.

"My interest was in learning more about Oswald, but I spent a not inconsiderable amount of time, as did some of Garrison's staff, in damage control. Garrison planned to charge Robert Perrin, who had killed himself in New Orleans in 1962, with being a Grassy Knoll assassin in 1963. He also planned to charge Edgar Eugene Bradley, based on the totally erroneous fact that he was one of three alleged tramps — who he also considered suspects — seen at the Texas School Book Depository at the moment of the crime. In fact, these men were winos, found in a parked railroad boxcar a block west and more than two blocks south of the scene of the crime an hour and a half later."

Dissociating himself from Garrison, Weisberg returned home, sold his farm and moved to Frederick County, where he devoted himself full time to gathering a record for history and a search for answers.

"We'll never know who killed John Kennedy," he says. "This film by Oliver Stone is a travesty. It is based on Jim Garrison's book, which is full of holes and incorrect information. I have a copy of the script. He makes a hero of Jim Garrison. I wrote Stone, offering him documentation to the contrary and access to my files, but he never responded personally. I then contacted the *Washington Post's* George Lardner, who I've known for 25 years, and as a result of his lengthy, detailed, accurate story, the controversy has raged from there."

George Lardner's May 19 piece in the *Washington Post*, "Dallas in Wonderland," prompted Stone to retaliate with a statement defending his position. Then came a rebuttal from Lardner, and the press began to wonder just what kind of movie Oliver Stone was making. *Time Magazine* ran a piece on the movie "JFK." *Esquire*



Despite serious health problems, including triple bypass heart surgery in 1989, Weisberg continues to work in his upstairs office, typing on "the Cadillac of typewriters," his Hermes 3000. "Millions of words have gone through it," he says.

"I've always liked what Andrew Jackson said: 'One determined man becomes a majority.' I've tried to practice that philosophy."

Magazine made it a cover story in October, and *Life Magazine's* December issue followed suit. Both *Esquire* and *Life* quoted Weisberg extensively. The American public is beginning to look at the movie in a different light, and that is Weisberg's intention. According to Jerry McKnight, "Harold Weisberg was the point man in this controversy."

David Wrone speaks from his office at the University of Wisconsin: "So many people today are consumed with the great 'I Am.' It's fostered, among other things, by talk shows and movie stars earning enormous sums. It's worse than cancer or AIDS. It's difficult to understand when one man has a different line of thinking . . . one that says 'I'm a grain of sand on the beach, but my goal is to make a better world.'"

"Harold Weisberg isn't into theories of whodunnit. His point is that the murder of a president has been covered up and buried, not only by the government but by historians. He's into the failure, of the systems that comprise our society,

to work for the truth — politicians, lawyers, historians, the press, the church, the intelligence community, the medical community.

"To Harold Weisberg, the law stands for justice, and he wants us to look at what happened, and its wrongness. He has amassed this documentation with honesty, hard work and fundamental decency."

Says Jerry McKnight: "The '60s was a turnaround decade that affected us critically. We need glasnost as much as the Russians. The assassination of John Kennedy was a monumental national — and world — tragedy. Had John Kennedy lived, the world would have been entirely different than it is today. Nixon would never have been president and stolen the Constitution. Iran Contra never would have happened. You're looking at a great U-turn in history, not to mention the breakdown of the legitimacy of our government.

"To stand by and see the failure of the government to investigate this crime just



John F. Kennedy makes a 1960 presidential primary campaign stop at the Hood College campus. Hood's new library will eventually house the documents Harold Weisberg has acquired over 25 years. They will be made available to researchers internationally through computer imaging.

appalls Harold Weisberg. He's no academician. He has no degrees. Some might dismiss him as a chicken farmer. But look at what he's done.

"Here is a man who had no influence, was broke and in debt and, with the help of his wife and Jim Lesar, one of the two best FOIA lawyers on the East Coast, managed to gather 250,000 documents through sheer determination. And his attitude is, 'Here's my archives. You have free access to it.' He doesn't ask why you want it. In fact, he knows that most using the information he's gathered will write what he does not agree with."

Adds David Wrone: "In making 'JFK,'

Oliver Stone has committed cultural treason. Harold Weisberg, by tirelessly searching for moral answers to our nation's deepest tragedy, is a character model for the rest of us — the young, especially. He has compiled a record for history that will stand when our lives are but memories in the minds of our grandchildren."

"There's a certain degree of satisfaction in that," admits Weisberg. "I mean, who the hell am I? My greatest asset was ignorance. If I can do this with no resources, just think what others can accomplish. But first — they have to try." ▼

Facts And Theories

Although John Kennedy's assassin may never be known, Jerry McKnight feels strongly, as do Harold Weisberg and David Wrone, that the Kennedy assassination was a conspiracy. None claims to know the group responsible: "We'll never know that," says Weisberg.

Jerry McKnight will go so far as to say that the assassinations of John and Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. were all conspiracies but probably not by the same group. "All three assassinations of the '60s have one rather broad philosophical connection," he says. "All three of these men were anxious to bring the war in Vietnam to an end and reorganize American priorities. They saw the bleeding away of resources that could have been used for domestic resources."

"John Kennedy was moving toward ending the Vietnam War and toward detente with the Russians. He and Khrushchev [during the Bay of Pigs] had stood on the edge of a volcano looking into a nuclear war — an experience no other statesman had ever had. Kennedy was so touched by this, he was resolved to reduce the military budget and work toward detente."

McKnight believes that regarding all three assassinations the official stories do not stack up in terms of the facts of the cases. Says he, "The assassination of a president is the highest form of treason."

Harold Weisberg also believes "the crime was the end product of a conspiracy. I do not think Oswald was the shooter. I think he may have been set up. This was a thoroughly professional job."

"Oswald was born and spent most of his life in New Orleans. As an adult he went to Russia for several years, then returned. In April 1963, he left the Dallas-Fort Worth area and went to New Orleans to look for a job. His activities there were consistent with those of someone trying to establish a cover."

"The Russians suspected he was an American agent — a sleeper agent ... which means an agent in place — to be used at some time for some purpose. I believe Jack Ruby was not a plant; I also believe he was highly subject to suggestion."

"I tell you I don't know who shot JFK, and you ask me for candidates. Who are the best candidates? I ask you, 'Cui bono? Who benefits?' Perhaps you can eliminate in that way, but you can't pinpoint." ▼