

Mr. Bruce Ivins  
408 Military Road  
Frederick, Md. 21701

10/26/87

Dear Mr. Ivins,

I found your letter of the 23rd to be amusing, entertaining and entirely evasive. Also quite irrelevant. To say nothing of silly.

The later refers to your representing that I was threatening you ("to blow my brains out") when I said, "make my day." While this may have originated with Clint Eastwood, of whom I know nothing - I've never seen one of his movies - I was, as I think most readers understood, using those words as His Incandescent Iconship uses them.

Until ~~last~~<sup>this</sup> particularly objectionable column, and I almost never read them, having that low an opinion of Meachum's writings, I'd responded only to what I regard as his anti-Semitism. I did this a number of times and there thus is in the papers a history and background you ignore. I have in each and every instance made factual comment, which you pretend still I did not do, and I also offered my personal opinions about his writing and his purposes in it.

I do not want to forget to assure you that I not only did not intend any threat to you of any kind, as I'm inclined to believe you knew anyway, it would be impossible for me. My health is so limiting I can't risk parking my car a block from where I'm going and I don't have a pistol anyway.

I am not going to reread that crap, but it is my recollection that Meachum's column was not on his position on the Bork nomination. It was him spouting off, pretending omniscience again, and as the records since shows, with his usual contempt for fact.

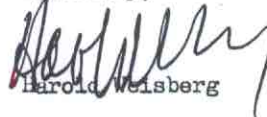
I'm pretty sure that what I referred to as "Vicious" is his saying that the committee members opposed to the Bork nomination would ~~XXXXX~~ "slink" and hide their positions in the vote on the Senate floor, in itself an impossibility.

You still say nothing at all about what I said. You've merely referred to some of the words I used, out of context. I am pretty sure that I asked you to be specific with regard to the fact in what I wrote and that I'd then justify the opinion. That you take this time and waste all those irrelevant words in itself is a sufficient answer. You will not because you cannot. I was accurate and he, as usual, wasn't.

I found all those words pretending to distance yourself from him amusing because in all of them you do not say that you are not his friend, do not know him, or that your letter to the editor was completely independent of him. Why not? Why not be simple and direct instead of trying to suggest what you do not say? Or is the answer obvious?

Thanks for making part of a day a little lighter.

Sincerely,

  
Harold Weisberg

406 Military Road  
Frederick, MD 21701  
October 23, 1987

Harold Weisberg  
7627 Old Receiver Road  
Frederick MD, 21701

Dear Mr. Weisberg:

I read with interest your letter in the October 22, 1987 edition of the Frederick News-Post. I regret that you interpreted the letter printed in the News-Post, "Attack Positions, Not Persons," to be a personal attack on you. In no way was it meant to be. If you reread the letter - a copy of the original letter is enclosed with this correspondence - you will see that there are only two references to "Mr. Harold Weisberg or "Mr. Weisberg" in the entire piece, the first identifying the source of your letter, the second including you with all the rest of us whose words occasionally appear in the News-Post. Please note that there are also no other references to "the author" or "the writer" in the letter. Perhaps you took offense with the first sentence in which your article (not you) is described as taking the cake. I am truly sorry if you did. If the letter were to be written again two sentences would be changed. The first sentence would read, "The recent article in the October 8 News-Post, "More dark days: This time it's Meachum," really takes the cake." The last sentence would read, "Perhaps all of us, letter writers and columnists alike, should direct our attacks toward positions, not persons." Although particular diligence was paid to "attack positions, not persons" in the letter, it sadly appears that those efforts were not sufficient if you believed that you were personally attacked.

I would now like to address some of the items brought up in your letter. I am not a lackey, flack or apologist for Mr. Meachum. I have no obedience to him or his opinions, and I had hoped that the first sentence in the last paragraph of my letter would have made that clear. Obviously I erred again if many people believe that the purpose of my letter was to come to his personal defense. What was the purpose of my letter? Did it matter that Roy Meachum was the first writer? No. Did it matter that he was commenting upon Robert Bork, Ronald Reagan, the U. S. Senate, or the Senate Judiciary Committee? No. Did it matter whether or not the first writer's comments were factually correct? As far as the reason for my letter goes, no. Did it matter that the second writer was Harold Weisberg or that the second writer disagreed with the position of the first writer? No. Well, if it did not matter who the first writer was, what he was writing about, how accurate he was, who the second writer was, and whether or not he agreed with the first writer, what did matter? Again, what was the purpose of my letter? The signal purpose of my letter was to condemn the

needless personal attacks which readers of the News-Post not infrequently see from the myriad columnists and letter writers. Regardless of whether or not they are accurate or true, personal attacks, as distinguished from attacks on positions, are disgusting, reprehensible, and serve no purpose in a discussion or argument. If the purpose of a second writer's efforts is to condemn the first writer's position, then such derogatory comments about the first writer as a person are unnecessary and do nothing to strengthen the cogency of the second writer's argument. If the purpose is to pillory and skewer the first writer, then such efforts don't belong in a newspaper.

Derogatory comments about writers aren't really difficult for any of us to conjure. There is no special skill in coming up with them. I can even invent them about myself:

"I suppose we readers should applaud Ivins' latest impotent efforts at literary acceptability."

"The level of Ivins' understanding of the problem approximates, but does not exceed, that of a grapefruit."

"Although he loudly trumpets himself to be a man of science, "Dr." Ivins' disdain for fact and reason places him instead within the halls of alchemy."

"Good little Catholic boy that he is, young Brucie should promptly march himself to the confessional and make an act of contrition for the letter he recently wrote."

"Ivins treats fiction as if it were fact, and fact as if it were the plague."

"Ivins has raised prevarication and distortion to the state of high art."

"Ivins carefully picks and chooses his way through the entire letter, being careful not to stumble on anything bearing the most remote resemblance to truth."

"The only discernible difference between Ivins' recent, incoherent ramblings and a bucket of horse manure is the bucket."

"Mrs. Ivins must indeed be proud that her son has grown up to make such a fine, outstanding, public fool of himself."

All disgusting. All needless.

You specifically challenged me to cite "a single inaccuracy" or any unfair opinion which was offered about Mr. Meachum's column. If you are speaking of your comments about "the Senate's consideration of the Bork nomination to the Supreme Court," then I cite nothing. As I hope I indicated above, your ideas and Mr. Meachum's ideas on the issue were not what concerned me or what prompted me to write my letter. I am not sufficiently familiar with the facts on Robert Bork, the Senate, the Judiciary Committee, and the history of the process of nomination of individuals to the Supreme Court to assess the validity of either Mr Meachum's or your arguments. If, on the other hand, you are including your personal comments on the columnist, some of which I enumerated in my letter, then how about "self-portrayed omniscience." The three dictionaries which I consulted define "omniscient" as possessing infinite, complete and perfect knowledge. In my years of reading columns of the News-Post and the Washington Post, I have yet to read one whose author claims to know everything about everything, although there are assuredly columnists who profess

to know a great deal about almost everything.

Again, I regret that people may believe that the purpose of my letter was to defend specifically Roy Meachum and his positions as well as to attack you. I also regret several items in the October 22 letter, specifically i) my being directly accused of deliberately tricking the readers ("with a Meachum-like trick, he suggests..."); ii) my being directly accused of lying ("Having been so free and unfaithful to reality,..."); iii) the Clint Eastwood-style threat ("Make my day!") to blow my brains out; iv) the attack upon my reputation ("If Mr. Ivins will put his reputation where his mouth is,..."); v) If I don't do what you tell me to do, then I will be put in my place where I belong ("If he does not, that will say more than enough to put him where he belongs."). The last sentence of your letter deserves special comment. Despite your letters, columns, or anything else, Sir, you don't determine what I do, what my place is, or where I belong.

I appreciate the time you have taken to read this lengthy correspondence. Have a good autumn and winter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Bruce E. Ivins". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Bruce E. Ivins

## 'Make my day' challenges Weisberg after criticism

Under the singularly appropriate headline, "Attack positions, not persons," Bruce Ivins, in common with a few others who do not like what I have written about Roy Meachum, does exactly what he says should not be done — he attacks me personally without attributing even a single factual error to me.

With a Meachum-like trick, he suggests that readers "Read the whole piece."

How many people does he *really* believe saved and can refer to the papers of a week ago, or — what would be necessary for understanding — Meachum's column of two weeks ago?

Events have overtaken all of us, and what we have written can be measured by those events. So I invite Mr. Ivins to go back to the Meachum column I addressed, published in the *Frederick Post* on Oct. 2, and compare it with my commentary on it, with developments in the Senate's consideration of the Bork nomination to the Supreme Court and with what has since been published about it, particularly the vote in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Having been so free and unfaithful to reality in his flacking for Meachum, who somehow seems entirely unable as well as unwilling to defend himself, I also challenge Mr. Ivins: produce a *single* inaccuracy in what I wrote. *Just one!*

In return I issue a dare to him: Pick out what you regard as any unfair opinion I offered about Meachum's column, that one, or any other I have addressed, and I'll respond with precise fact to explain it.

I don't really care about Mr. Ivins' personal attack on me and I was entirely unworried and undeterred when, without mentioning my name, Roy Meachum threatened a libel suit. I do suggest, however, that personal attacks, entirely out of context and without mention of the undisputed fact in what I wrote, are the ultimate in bankruptcy in any kind of controversy. It is also unmanly.

If Mr. Ivins is more than a flack for Meachum, I suggest that he might select from what he himself quoted of what I wrote, pretending that I had offered opinion only when that is not true, what I described as "venomous," "ridiculous" and unfactual in Meachum's "Dark days" column. If Mr. Ivins will put *his* reputation where his mouth is, I'll put mine on the *specifics* in the facts I'll provide.

Make my day!

And if he does not, that will say more than enough to put him where he belongs.

HAROLD WEISBERG  
Frederick

10/22/87

406 Military Road  
Frederick, MD 21701  
October 9, 1987  
301/662-1084 - home  
301/663-7341 - work

Letters to the Editor  
Frederick News-Post  
200 East Patrick Street  
Frederick, MD 21701

Dear Editor:

Mr. Harold Weisberg's article in the October 8 News-Post, "More dark days: This time it's Meachum," really takes the cake. I would hazard that many readers, myself included, sensed that the main purpose of the article was not to criticize Roy Meachum's position concerning Robert Bork's nomination to the U. S. Supreme Court. I am sorry to say that the primary reason for the article appeared to be to attack Mr. Meachum himself. Never in the News-Post have I seen so much invective hurled at one individual in such a small space. Was it malicious? False? Defamatory? Here are just a few tidbits - judge for yourself: "...Roy Meachum's ignorance, prejudices and contempt for fact and reality." "...Meachum just makes it up as he goes...." "...the murk of Meachum's mind...." "Meachum's misrepresentation...." "...Meachum's standard copout...." "The rest of this newest Meachum mishmash ranges from the venomous to the ridiculous." "...the self-portrayed, omniscient Meachum...." "...Meachum's propaganda and self-promotion." Wow! All this and more in just one, little article! (For those who believe that the quotations have been improperly taken out of context, I encourage you to read the whole piece.)

I have disagreed with more than one column by Roy Meachum, and I'm sure that other individuals have disagreed with some of his articles. In our zeal to contradict, however, it hardly seems necessary to resort to calumny and character assassination. Perhaps all of us, letter writers, columnists, even Mr. Meachum and Mr. Weisberg, should direct our attacks toward positions, not persons."

Sincerely,

*Bruce E. Ivins*  
Bruce Ivins