

Dear George,

5/31/91

The news that Bradlee et al have subordinated journalistic to other considerations and bowed to Oliver Stone's indecent and wrong demands is, of course, troubling. So also is the trouble I'm having with the left foot. After the heart surgery the family doctor said he'd expected me to lose the left leg and thigh ten years ago. While I have no reason to believe that whatever the immediate problem is will lead to that loss, I have lived this way since 1975 and I cannot entirely ignore the possibility. So, instead of my usual walking this morning I write you about the unwelcome Stone news.

First and foremost to urge that what should dominate your thinking and what you do is your own and your family's interest. You have not compromised principle. and it would be terrible for your son to go to college the way I did.

Next I think you should undertake to learn why they did what they did. I don't know Allen at all and Bradlee only slightly, but I have no reason to believe that they liked doing what they did or wanted to. (Because I do believe this I'll do nothing to embarrass them or the Post.) I know what spurious lawsuits are and what they can cost. Until I learn otherwise I'll continue with the belief that they did what they did at lawyers' insistence.

Whether or not this is true despite - contrary to - my personal interest I think you should learn what their attitude would be were you to continue and do the book. Only people of independent means can tilt at windmills. I would not want you and your family to have to live as we have, to make the sacrifices I've made so I might try to do what I have. If it would hurt you in any way I think you ought consider withdrawing from our agreement. If you decide it won't, despite my anxiety for the book to appear before the movie does, so far as I am concerned, our agreement stands, and the book can appear whenever that is possible.

I do not regard Bradlee as omniscient or completely independent and although I am not aware of all the responsibilities he bears I am aware of enough of them to understand that he may have seen no practical alternative. Unwelcome as it is to me I do assume that he believed he had no real choice. This is why I said above that I'll do nothing to embarrass him.

I've been down the road of frivolous and spurious lawsuits and I know how lawyers react to them. They can be extraordinarily costly. The Post has had some costly lawsuits and that can be in the lawyers' minds as, from their responsibilities, it should be.

If there is no risk for you to do the book, let us discuss the shortest possible one that could be satisfactory in order that it be completed as soon as it can be.

If after giving this thought and learning what you can you think you should withdraw, and my hope is that you do not, I'd like to discuss my alternatives with you.

The only other person I had in mind when I first proposed this with you is a stranger and right now I do not even remember his name! I have disagreed with some of his earlier writing but I was impressed by his Outlook piece on the RFK case.

I have no reason to assume that Bradlee and the Post would not want you to continue but because I do assume that they are already embarrassed and we do not know what influenced their thinking and decision I think your own and essential interest requires that you know and I think also it is the interest that should predominate.

Sometimes we don't like it, and right now I don't, but there is the real world in which we have to live, realities we have to face. Good luck with them!

Sincerely,

